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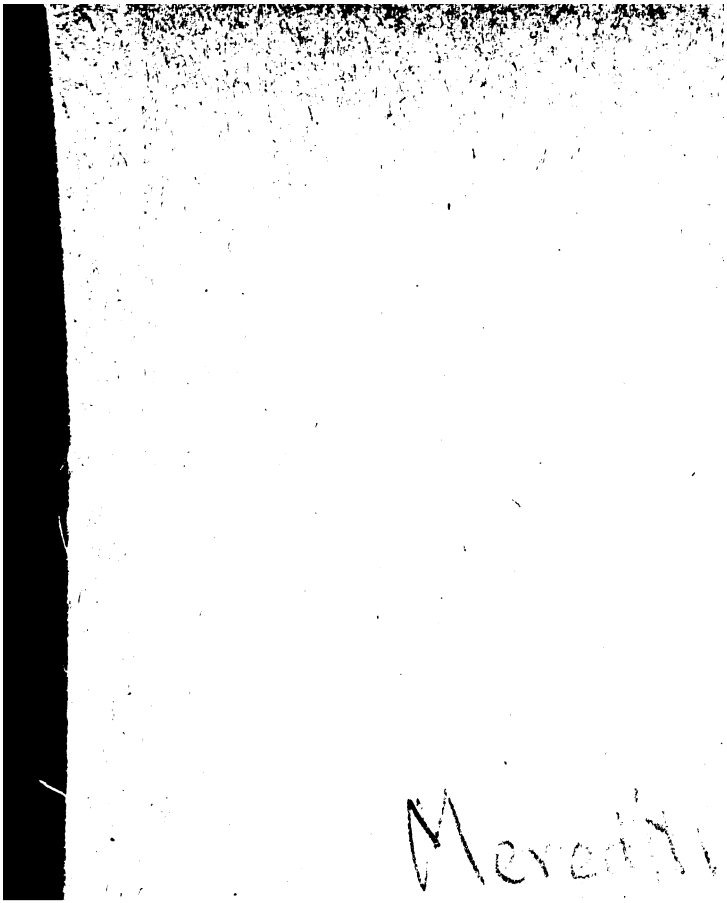
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LORD ORMONT

AND HIS AMINTA

A NOVEL.

BY

GEORGE MEREDITH,

AUTHOR OF "THE ORDEAL OF RICHARD FEVEREL," ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. II.

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1895.

CAROLINA

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LORD ORMONT AND HIS AMINTA.

CHAPTER I.

SHOWING A SECRET FISHED WITHOUT ANGLING.

THAT great couchant dragon of the devouring jaws and the withering breath, known as our London world, was in expectation of an excitement above yawns on the subject of a beautiful Lady Doubtful proposing herself, through a group of infatuated influential friends, to a decorous Court, as one among the ladies acceptable. The popular version of it sharpened the sauce by mingling romance and cynicism very happily; for the numerous cooks, when out of the kitchen, will furnish a piquant dish. Thus, a jewel-eyed girl of half English origin (a wounded British officer is amiably nursed in a castle near the famous Peninsula battlefield, etc.), running wild down the streets of Seville, is picked

up by Lord Ormont, made to discard her tambourine, brought over to our shores, and allowed the decoration of his name, without the legitimate adornment of his title. Discontented with her position after a time, she now pushes boldly to claim the place which will be most effective in serving her as a bath. She has, by general consent, beauty; she must, seeing that she counts influential friends, have witchery. Those who have seen her riding and driving beside her lord, speak of Andalusian grace, Oriental lustre, fit qualification for the fair slave of a notoriously susceptible old warrior.

She won a party in the widening gossip world; and enough of a party in the regent world to make a stream. Pretending to be the actual Countess of Ormont, though not publicly acknowledged as his countess by the earl, she had on her side the strenuous few who knew and liked her, some who were pleased compassionately to patronise, all idle admirers of a shadowed beautiful woman at bay, the devotees of any beauty in distress, and such as had seen, such as imagined they had seen, such as could paint a mental picture of a lady of imposing stature, persuasive appearance, pathetic history, and pronounce her to be unjustly treated, with a general belief that she was visible and breathing. She had

the ready enthusiasts, the responsive sentimentalists, and an honest active minor number, of whom not every one could be declared perfectly unspotted in public estimation, however innocent under verdict of the courts of law.

Against her was the livid cloud-bank over a flowery field, that has not yet spoken audible thunder: the terrible aggregate social woman, of man's creation, hated by him, dreaded, scorned, satirised, and nevertheless, upheld, esteemed, applauded: a mark of civilisation, on to which our human society must hold as long as we have nothing humaner. She exhibits virtue, with face of waxen angel, with paw of desert beast, and blood of victims on it. Her fold is a genial climate and the material pleasures for the world's sheepy: worshipping herself, she claims the sanctification of a performed religion. She is gentle when unassailed, going her way serenely, with her malady in the blood. When the skin bears witness to it, she swallows an apothecary, and there is a short convulsion. She is refreshed by cutting off diseased inferior members: the superior betraying foul symptoms, she covers up and retains; rationally, too, for they minister to her present existence, and she lives all in the present. Her subjects are the mixed subservient; among her

rebellious are earth's advanced, who have a cold morning on their foreheads, and these would not dethrone her, they would but shame and purify by other methods than the druggist. She loves nothing. Undoubtedly, she dislikes the vicious. On that merit she subsists.

The vexatious thing in speaking of her is, that she compels to the use of the rhetorician's brass instrument. As she is one of the Powers giving life and death, one may be excused. This tremendous queen of the congregation has brought discredit on her sex for the scourge laid on quivering female flesh, and for the flippant indifference shown to misery and to fine distinctions between right and wrong, good and bad; and particularly for the undiscriminating hardness upon the starved of women. We forget her having been conceived in the fear of men, shaped to gratify them. She is their fiction of the state they would fain beguile themselves to suppose her sex has reached, for their benefit; where she may be queen of it in a corner, certain of a loyal support, if she will only give men her half-the-world's assistance to uplift the fabric comfortable to them; together with assurance of paternity, ease of mind in absence, exclusive possession, enormous and minutest, etc.; not by any means

omitting a regimental orderliness, from which men are privately exempt, because they are men, or because they are grown boys—the brisker at lessons after a vacation or a truancy, says the fiction.

In those days the world had oscillated, under higher leading than its royal laxity, to rigidity. Tiny peccadilloes were no longer matter of jest, and the sinner exposed stood *sola* to receive the brand. A beautiful Lady Doubtful needed her husband's countenance if she was to take one of the permanent steps in public places. The party of Lady Charlotte Eglett called on the livid cloud-bank aforesaid to discharge celestial bolts and sulphur on the head of an impudent, underbred, ambitious young slut, whose arts had bewitched a distinguished nobleman not young in years at least, and ensnared the remainder wits of some principal ancient ladies of the land. Professional Puritans, born conservatives, malicious tattlers, made up a goodly tail to Lady Charlotte's party. The epithet "unbred" was accredited upon the quoted sayings and doings of the pretentious young person's aunt, repeated abroad by noblemen and gentlemen present when she committed herself; and the same were absurd. They carried a laugh, and so they lived and circulated. Lord Ormont submitted to the infliction of that

horrid female in his household! It was no wonder he stopped short of allying himself with the family.

Nor was it a wonder that the naturally enamoured old warrior or invalided Mars (for she had the gift of beauty) should deem it prudent to be out of England when she and her crazy friends determined on the audacious move. Or put it the other way—for it is just as confounding right side or left—she and her friends take advantage of his absence to make the clever push for an establishment, and socially force him to legalise their union on his return. The deeds of the preceding reign had bequeathed a sort of legendary credence to the wildest tales gossip could invent under a demurer.

But there was the fact, the earl was away. Lady Charlotte's party buzzed everywhere. Her ladyship had come to town to head it. Her ladyship laid trains of powder from dinner-parties, balls, routs, park-processions, into the Lord Chamberlain's ear, and fired and exploded them, deafening the grand official. Do you consider that virulent Pagan Goddesses and the flying torch-furies are extinct? Error of Christians! We have relinquished the old names and have no new ones for them; but they are here, inextinguishable, threading the day and night air with their dire squib-trail, if we would but see.

Hissing they go, and we do not hear. We feel the effects.

Upon the counsel of Mrs. Lawrence, Aminta sent a letter to Lord Ormont at his hotel in Paris, informing him of the position of affairs. He had delayed his return, and there had been none of his brief communications.

She wrote, as she knew, as she felt, coldly. She was guided by others, and her name was up before the world, owing to some half-remembered impulsion of past wishes, but her heart was numbed; she was not a woman to have a wish without a beat of the heart in it. For her name she had a feeling, to be likened rather to the losing gambler's contemplation of a big stake he has flung, and sees it gone while fortune is undecided; and he catches at a philosophy nothing other than his hug of a modest little background pleasure, that he has always preferred to this accursed bad habit of gambling with the luck against him. Reckless in the cast, she was reckless of success.

Her letter was unanswered.

Then, and day by day more strongly, she felt for her name. She put a false heart into it. She called herself to her hearing the Countess of Ormont, and deigned to consult the most foolish friend she

could have chosen—her aunt; and even listened to her advice, that she should run about knocking at all the doors open to her, and state her case against the earl. It seemed the course to take, the moment for taking it. Was she not asked if she could now at last show she had pride? Her pride ran stinging through her veins, like a band of freed prisoners who head the rout to fire a city. She charged her lord with having designedly—oh! cunningly indeed—left her to be the prey of her enemies at the hour when he knew it behoved him to be her great defender. There had been no disguise of the things in progress: they had been spoken of allusively, quite comprehensibly, after the fashion common with two entertaining a secret semi-hostility on a particular subject; one of them being the creature that blushes and is educated to be delicate, reserved, and timorous. He was not ignorant, and he had left her, and he would not reply to her letter!

So fell was her mood, that an endeavour to conjure up the scene of her sitting beside the death-bed of Matthew Weyburn's mother, failed to sober and smoothe it, holy though that time was. The false heart she had put into the pride of her name was powerfuller than the heart in her bosom. But to

what end had the true heart counselled her of late? It had been a home of humours and languors, an impotent insurgent, the sapper of her character; and as we see in certain disorderly states a curative incendiarism usurp the functions of the sluggish citizen, and the work of re-establishment done by destruction, in peril of a total extinction, Aminta's feverish anger on behalf of her name went a stretch to vivify and give her dulled character a novel edge. She said good-bye to cowardice. "I have no husband to defend me—I must do it for myself." The peril of a too complete exercise of independence was just intimated to her perceptions. On whom the blame? And let the motively guilty go mourn over consequences! That Institution of Marriage was eyed. Is it not a halting step to happiness? It is the step of a cripple; and one leg or the other poses for the feebler sex,—small is the matter which! And is happiness our cry? Our cry is rather for circumstance and occasion to use our functions, and the conditions are denied to women by Marriage—denied to the luckless of women, who are many, very many: denied to Aminta, calling herself Countess of Ormont, for one; denied to Mrs. Lawrence Finchley for another, and in a base bad manner. She had defended her good name triumphantly, only

to enslave herself for life or snatch at the liberty which besmirches.

Reviewing Mrs. Lawrence, Aminta's real heart pressed forward at the beat, in tender pity of the woman for whom a yielding to love was to sin; and unwomanly is the woman who does not love: men will say it. Aminta found herself phrasing, "Why was she unable to love her husband?—he is not old." She hurried in flight from the remark to confidences imparted by other ladies, showing strange veins in an earthly world; after which, her mind was bent to rebuke Mrs. Pagnell for the silly soul's perpetual allusions to Lord Ormont's age. She did not think of his age. But she was vividly thinking that she was young. Young, married, loveless, cramped in her energies, publicly dishonoured—a Lady Doubtful, courting one friend whom she liked among women, one friend whom she respected among men; that was the sketch of her.

That was in truth the outline, as much as Aminta dared sketch of herself without dragging her down lower than her trained instinct would bear to look. Our civilisation shuns nature; and most shuns it in the most artificially civilised, to suit the market. They, however, are always close to their mother nature, beneath their second nature's mask of custom;

and Aminta's unconscious concluding touch to the sketch: "My husband might have helped me to a footing in Society," would complete it as a coloured picture, if writ in tones.

She said it, and for the footing in Society she had lost her taste.

Mrs. Lawrence brought the final word from high quarters: that the application must be deferred until Lord Ormont returned to town. It was known before, that such would be the decision. She had it from the eminent official himself, and she kicked about the room, setting her pretty mouth and nose to pout and sniff, exactly like a boy whose chum has been mishandled by a bully.

"Your dear good man is too much for us. I thought we should drive him. *C'est un rusé homme de guerre.* I like him, but I could slap him. He stops the way. Upon my word, he seems tolerably careless of his treasure. Does he suppose Mrs. Paggy is a protection? Do you know she's devoted to that man Morsfield? He listens to her stories. To judge by what he shouts aloud, he intends carrying you off the first opportunity, divorcing, and installing you in Cobeck Hall. All he fears is, that your lord won't divorce. You should have seen him the other day; he marched up and down the room, smacking his

head and crying out: 'Legal measures or any weapons her husband pleases!' For he has come to believe that the lady would have been off with him long before, if her lord had no claim to the marital title. 'It's that husband I can't get over! that husband!' He reminded me, to the life, of Lawrence Finchley with a headache the morning after a supper, striding, with his hand on the shining middle of his head: 'It's that Welsh rabbit! that Welsh rabbit!" He has a poor digestion, and he will eat cheese. The Welsh rabbit chased him into his bed. But listen to me, dear, about your Morsfield. I told you he was dangerous."

"He is not my Morsfield," said Aminta.

"Beware of his having a tool in Paggy. He boasts of letters."

"Mine? Two: and written to request him to cease writing to me."

"He stops at nothing. And, oh, my Simplicity! don't you see you gave him a step in begging him to retire? Morsfield has lived a good deal among our neighbours, who expound the physiology of women. He anatomises us; pulls us to pieces, puts us together, and then animates us with a breath of his 'passion'—sincere upon every occasion, I don't doubt. He spared me, although he saw I was

engaged. Perhaps it was because I'm of no definite colour. Or he thought I was not a receptacle for 'passion.' And quite true,—Adder, the dear good fellow, has none. Or where should we be? On a Swiss Alp, in a châlet, he shooting chamois, and I milking cows, with *ah-ahio, ah-ahio,* all day long, and a quarrel at night over curds and whey. Well, and that's a better old pensioner's limp to his end for 'passion' than the foreign hotel bell rung mightily, and one of the two discovered with a dagger in the breast, and the other a *don't look* lying on the pavement under the window. Yes, and that's better than 'passion' splitting and dispersing upon new adventures, from habit, with two sparks remaining of the fire."

Aminta took Mrs. Lawrence's hands. "Is it a lecture?"

She was kissed. "Frothy gabble. I'm really near to 'passion' when I embrace you. You're the only one I could run away with; live with all alone, I believe. I wonder men can see you while that silly lord of yours is absent, and not begin Morsfielding. They're virtuous if they resist. Paggy tells the world . . . well?"

Aminta had reddened. "What does my aunt tell the world?"

Mrs. Lawrence laid her smoothing hand absently on a frill of lace fichu above a sternly disciplined bosom at half-heave. "I think I can judge now that you're not much hurt by this wretched business of the presentation. The little service I could do was a moral lesson to me on the subject of deuce-may-care antecedents. My brother Tom, too, was always playing truant, as a boy. It's in the blood."

She seemed to be teasing, and Aminta cried: "My aunt! Let me hear. She tells the world——?"

"Paggy? ah, yes. Only that she says the countess has an exalted opinion of Mr. Secretary's handwriting —as witnessed by his fair copy of the Memoirs, of course."

"Poor woman! How can she talk such foolishness! I guessed it."

"You wear a dark red rose when you're guessing, *ma mie,*—French for, my Aminta."

"But consider, Isabella, Mr. Weyburn has just had the heaviest of losses. My aunt should spare mention of him."

"Matthew Weyburn! we both like the name." Mrs. Lawrence touched at her friend and gazed. "I've seen it on certain evenings—crimson over an olive sky. What it forebodes, I can't imagine; but

it's the end of a lovely day. They say it threatens rain, if it begins one. It's an ominous herald."

"You make me," said Aminta. "I must redden if you keep looking at me so closely."

"Now frown one little bit, please. I love to see you. I love to see a secret disclose itself ingenuously."

"But what secret, my dear?" cried Aminta's defence of her innocence; and she gave a short frown.

"Have no fear. Mr. Secretary is not the man to be Morsfielding. And he can enjoy his repast; a very good sign. But is he remaining long?"

"He is going soon, I hear."

"He's a good boy. I could have taken to him myself, and not dreaded a worrying. There's this difference between you and me, though, my Aminta; one of us has the fireplace prepared for what's-his-name—'passion.' Kiss me. How could you fancy you were going to have a woman for your friend and keep hidden from her any one of the secrets that blush! and with Paggy to aid! I am sure it means very little. Admiration for good handwriting is——" a smile broke the sentence.

"You're astray, Isabella."

"Not I, dear, I'm too fond of you."

"You read what is not."

"What is not yet written, you mean."

"What never could be written."

"I read what is in the blood, and comes out to me when I look. That lord of yours should take to study you as I have done ever since I fell in love with you. He's not counselling himself well in keeping away."

"Now you speak wisely," said Aminta.

"Not a particle more wisely. And the reason is close at hand—see. You are young, you attract—how could it be otherwise?—and you have 'passion' sleeping, and likely to wake with a spring whether roused or not. In my observation good-man t'other fellow—the poet's friend—is never long absent when the time is ripe—at least, not in places where we gather together. Well, one is a buckler against the other: I don't say with lovely Amy May,—with an honourable woman. But Aminta can smell powder and grow more mettlesome. Who can look at you and be blind to passion sleeping! The sight of you makes me dream of it—me, a woman, cool as a wine-cellar or a well. So there's to help you to know yourself and be on your guard. I know I'm not deceived, because I've fallen in love with you, and no love can be without jealousy, so I have the needle

in my breast, that points at any one who holds a bit of you. Kind of sympathetic needle to the magnet behind anything. You'll know it, if you don't now. I should have felt the thing without the aid of Paggy. So, then, imagine all my nonsense unsaid, and squeeze a drop or two of *sirop de bon conseil* out of it, as if it were your own wise meditations." The rest of Mrs. Lawrence's discourse was a swallow's wing skimming the city stream. She departed, and Aminta was left to beat at her heart and ask whether it had a secret.

But if there was one, the secret was out, and must have another name. It had been a secret for her until she heard her friend speak those pin-points that pricked her heart, and sent the blood coursing over her face, like a betrayal, so like as to resemble a burning confession.

But if this confessed the truth, she was the insanest of women. No woman could be surer that she had her wits. She had come to see things, previously mysteries, with surprising clearness. As, for example, that passion was part of her nature; therefore her very life, lying tranced. She certainly could not love without passion: such an abandonment was the sole justification of love in a woman standing where she stood. And now for the first time she

saw her exact position before the world; and she saw some way into her lord: saw that he nursed a wound, extracted balm from anything enabling him to show the world how he despised it, and undesignedly immolated her for the petty gratification.

It could not, in consequence, be the truth. She was passionless. Once it was absolutely true. She swam away to the golden-circled Island of Once; landed, and dwelt there solitarily and blissfully, looking forward to Sunday's walk round the park, looking back on it. Proudly she could tell herself that her dreams of the Prince of the Island had not been illusions as far as he was concerned; for he had a great soul. He did not aim at a tawdry glory. He was a loss to our army—no loss to his country or the world. A woman might clasp her feeling of pride in having foreseen distinction for him; and a little, too, in distinguishing now the true individual distinction from the feathered uniform vulgar. Where the girl's dreams had proved illusions, she beheld in a title and luxuries, in a loveless marriage.

That was perilous ground. Still it taught her to see that the substantial is the dust; and passion not being active, she could reflect. After a series of penetrative flashes, flattering to her intelligence the more startling they were, reflection was exhausted.

She sank on her nature's desire to join or witness agonistic incidents, shocks, wrestlings, the adventures which are brilliant air to sanguine energies. Imagination shot up, and whirled the circle of a succession of them; and she had a companion and leader, unfeatured, reverently obeyed, accepted as not to be known, not to be guessed at, in the deepest hooded inmost of her being speechlessly divined.

The sudden result of Aminta's turmoil was a determination that she must look on Steignton. And what was to be gained by that? She had no idea. And how had she stopped her imaginative flight with the thought of looking on Steignton? All she could tell was, that it would close a volume. She could not say why the volume must be closed.

Her orders for the journey down to Steignton were prompt. Mrs. Pagnell had an engagement at the house of Lady Staines for the next day to meet titles and celebrities, and it precluded her comprehension of the project. She begged to have the journey postponed. She had pledged her word, she said.

"To Mr. Morsfield?" said Aminta.

Her aunt was astounded.

"I did tell him we should be there, my dear."

"He appears to have a pleasure in meeting you."

"He is one of the real gentlemen of the land."

"You correspond with him?"

"I may not be the only one."

"Foolish aunty! How can you speak to me in that senseless way?" cried Aminta. "You know the schemer he is, and that I have no protection from his advances unless I run the risk of bloodshed."

"My dear Aminta, whenever I go into society, and he is present, I know I shall not be laughed at, or fall into that pit of one of their dead silences, worse for me to bear than titters and faces. It is their way of letting one feel they are of birth above us. Mr. Morsfield—purer blood than many of their highest titles—is always polite, always deferential; he helps me to feel I am not quite out of my element in the sphere I prefer. We shall be travelling alone?"

"Have you any fear?"

"Not if nothing happens. Might we not ask that Mr. Weyburn?"

"He has much work to do. He will not long be here. He is absent to-day."

Mrs. Pagnell remarked: "I must say he earns his money easily."

Aminta had softened herself with the allusion to the shortness of his time with them. Her aunt's

coarse hint, and the thought of his loss, and the banishment it would be to her all the way to Steignton, checked a sharp retort she could have uttered, but made it necessary to hide her eyes from sight. She went to her bedroom, and flung herself on the bed. Even so little as an unspoken defence of him shook her to floods of tears.

CHAPTER II.

ALONG TWO ROADS TO STEIGNTON.

UNACCOUNTABLE resolutions, if impromptu and springing from the female breast, are popularly taken for caprices; and even when they divert the current of a history, and all the more when they are very small matters producing a memorable crisis. In this way does a lazy world consign discussion to silence with the cynical closure. Man's hoary shrug at a whimsy sex is the reading of his enigma still.

But ask if she has the ordinary pumping heart in that riddle of a breast: and then, as the organ cannot avoid pursuit, we may get hold of it, and succeed in spelling out that she is consequent, in her fashion. She is a creature of the apparent moods and shifts and tempers only because she is kept in narrow confines, resembling, if you like, a wild cat caged. Aminta's journey down to Steignton turned the course of other fortunes besides her own; and she disdained the minor adventure it was, while dreaming it important; and she determined eagerly

on going, without wanting to go; and it was neither from a sense of duty nor in a spirit of contrariety that she went. Nevertheless, with her heart in hand, her movements are traceably as rational as a soldier's before the enemy or a trader's matching his customer.

The wish to look on Steignton had been spoken or sighed for during long years between Aminta and her aunt, until finally shame and anger clinched the subject. To look on Steignton for once was now Aminta's phrasing of her sudden resolve; it appeared as a holiday relief from recent worries, and it was an expedition with an aim, though she had but the coldest curiosity to see the place, and felt alien to it. Yet the thought, never to have seen Steignton! roused phantoms of dead wishes to drive the strange engine she was, faster than the living would have done. Her reason for haste was rationally founded on the suddenness of her resolve, which, seeing that she could not say she desired to go, seemed to come of an external admonition; and it counselled quick movements, lest her inspired obedience to the prompting should as abruptly breathe itself out. "And in that case I shall never have seen Steignton at all," she said, with perfect calmness, and did not attempt to sound her meaning.

She did know that she was a magazine of a great storage of powder. It banked inoffensively dry. She had forgiven her lord, owning the real nobleman he was in courtesy to women, whom his inherited ideas of them so quaintly minimised and reduced to pretty insect or tricky reptile. They, too, had the choice of being ultimately the one or the other in fact; the latter most likely.

If, however, she had forgiven her lord, the shattering of their union was the cost of forgiveness. In letting him stand high, as the lofty man she had originally worshipped, she separated herself from him, to feel that the humble *she* was of a different element, as a running water at a mountain's base. They are one in the landscape; they are far from one in reality. Aminta's pride of being chafed at the yoke of marriage.

Her aunt was directed to prepare for a start at an early hour the next morning. Mrs. Pagnell wrote at her desk, and fussed, and ordered the posting-chariot, and bewailed herself submissively; for it was the Countess of Ormont speaking when Aminta delivered commands, and the only grievance she dared to mutter was "the unexpectedness." Her letters having been despatched, she was amazed in the late evening to hear Aminta give the footman orders for

the chariot to be ready at the door an hour earlier than the hour previously appointed. She remonstrated. Aminta simply observed that it would cause less inconvenience to all parties. A suspicion of her aunt's proceedings was confirmed by the good woman's flustered state. She refrained from smiling.

She would have mustered courage to invite Matthew Weyburn as her escort, if he had been at hand. He was attending to his affairs with lawyers—mainly with his friend Mr. Abner. She studied map and gazetteer till late into the night. Giving her orders to the postillion on the pavement in the morning, she named a south-westerly direction out of London, and after entering the chariot, she received a case from one of the footmen.

"What is that, my dear?" said Mrs. Pagnell.

Aminta unlocked and laid it open. A pair of pistols met Mrs. Pagnell's gaze.

"We sha'n't be in need of those things?" the lady said anxiously.

"One never knows, on the road, aunt."

"Loaded? You wouldn't hesitate to fire, I'm sure."

"At Mr. Morsfield himself, if he attempted to stop me."

Mrs. Pagnell withdrew into her astonishment, and

presently asked, in a tone of some indignation: "Why did you mention Mr. Morsfield, Aminta?"

"Did you not write to him yesterday afternoon, aunt?"

"You read the addresses on my letters!"

"Did you not supply him with our proposed route and the time for starting?"

"Pistols!" exclaimed Mrs. Pagnell. "One would fancy you think we are in the middle of the last century. Mr. Morsfield is a gentleman, not a highwayman."

"He gives the impression of his being a madman."

"The real madman is your wedded husband, Aminta, if wedding it was!"

It was too surely so, in Aminta's mind. She tried, by looking out of the window, to forget her companion. The dullness of the roads and streets opening away to flat fields combined with the postillion's unvarying jog to sicken her thoughts over the exile from London she was undergoing, and the chance that Matthew Weyburn might call at a vacant house next day, to announce his term of service to the earl, whom he had said he much wanted to see. He said it in his sharp manner when there was decision behind it. Several times after

contemplating the end of her journey, and not perceiving any spot of pleasure ahead, an emotion urged her to turn back; for the young are acutely reasoning when their breasts advise them to quit a road where no pleasure beckons.

Unlike Matthew Weyburn, the tiptoe sparkle of a happy mind did not leap from her at wayside scenes, a sweep of grass, distant hills, clouds in flight. She required, since she suffered, the positive of events or blessings to kindle her glow.

Matthew Weyburn might call at the house. Would he be disappointed? He had preserved her letters of the old school-days. She had burnt his. But she had not burnt the letters of Mr. Morsfield; and she cared nothing for that man. Assuredly she merited the stigma branding women as crack-brained. Yet she was not one of the fools; she could govern a household, and she liked work, she had the capacity for devotedness. So, therefore, she was a woman perverted by her position, and she shook her bonds in revolt from marriage. Imagining a fall down some suddenly spied chasm of her nature, she had a sisterly feeling for the women named sinful. At the same time, reflecting that they are sinful only with the sinful, she knelt thankfully at the feet of the man who had saved her from such danger. Tears

threatened. They were a poor atonement for the burning of his younger letters. But not he—she was the sufferer, and she whipped up a sensation of wincing at the flames they fell to, and at their void of existence, committing sentimental idiocies worthy of a lovesick girl, consciously to escape the ominous thought, which her woman's perception had sown in her, that he too chafed at a marriage no marriage: was true in fidelity, not true through infidelity, as she had come to be. The thought implied misery for both. She entered a black desolation, with the prayer that he might not be involved, for his own sake: partly also on behalf of the sustaining picture the young schoolmaster at his task, merry among his dear boys, to trim and point them, body and mind, for their business in the world, painted for her a weariful prospect of the life she must henceforth drag along.

Is a woman of the plain wits common to numbers ever deceived in her perception of a man's feelings for her? Let her first question herself whether she respects him. If she does not, her judgment will go easily astray, intuition and observation are equally at fault, she has no key; he has charmed her blood, that is all. But if she respects him, she cannot be deceived; respect is her embrace of a man's character.

Aminta's vision was clear. She had therefore to juggle with the fact revealed, that she might keep her heart from rushing out; and the process was a disintegration of her feminine principle of docility under the world's decrees. At each pause of her mental activity she was hurled against the state of marriage. Compassion for her blameless fellow in misery brought a deluge to sweep away all institutions and landmarks.

But supposing the blest worst to happen, what exchange had she to bestow? Her beauty? She was reputed beautiful. It had made a madman of one man; and in her poverty of endowments to be generous with, she hovered over Mr. Morsfield like a cruel vampire, for the certification that she had a much-prized gift to bestow upon his rival.

But supposing it: she would then be no longer in the shiny garden of the flowers of wealth; and how little does beauty weigh as an aid to an active worker in the serious fighting world! She would be a kind of potted rose-tree under his arm, of which he must eventually tire.

A very cold moment came, when it seemed that even the above supposition, in the case of a woman who has been married, is shameful to her, a sin against her lover, and should be obliterated under

floods of scarlet. For, if she has pride, she withers to think of pushing the most noble of men upon his generosity. And, further, if he is not delicately scrupulous, is there not something wanting in him? The very cold wave passed, leaving the sentence: better dream of being plain friends.

Mrs. Pagnell had been quietly chewing her cud of the sullens, as was the way with her after a snub. She now resumed her gossip of the naughty world she knelt to and expected to see some day stricken by a bolt from overhead; containing, as it did, such wicked members as that really indefensible brazen Mrs. Amy May, who was only the daughter of a half-pay naval captain, and that Marquis of Colleston, who would, they say, decorate her with his title to-morrow, if her husband were but somewhere else. She spread all sorts of reports about Mr. Morsfield, and he was honour itself in his reserve about her. "Depend upon it, Aminta—he was not more than a boy then, and they say she aimed at her enfranchisement by plotting the collision, for his Yorkshire revenues are immense, and he is, you know, skilful in the use of arms, and Captain May has no resources whatever: penury! no one cares to speculate how they contrive!—but while that dreadful duelling —and my lord as bad as any in his day—exists,

depend upon it, an unscrupulous good-looking woman has as many lives for her look of an eye or lift of a finger as a throned Ottoman Turk on his divan."

Aminta wished to dream. She gave her aunt a second dose, and the lady relapsed again.

Power to dream had gone. She set herself to look at roadside things, cottage gardens, old housewives in doorways, gaffer goodman meeting his crony on the path, groups of boys and girls. She would take the girls, Matthew Weyburn the boys. She had lessons to give to girls, she had sympathy, pity, anticipation. That would be a life of happy service. It might be a fruitful trial of the system he proposed, to keep the boys and girls in company as much as possible, both at lessons and at games. His was the larger view. Her lord's view appeared similar to that of her aunt's "throned Ottoman Turk on his divan." Matthew Weyburn believed in the bettering of the world; Lord Ormont had no belief like it.

Presently Mrs. Pagnell returned to the charge, and once more she was nipped, and irritated to declare she had never known her niece's temper so provoking. Aminta was launching a dream of a lass she had seen in a field, near a white hawthorn, standing upright, her left arm aloft round the pole of a rake, the rim of her bonnet tipped on her forehead;

an attitude of a rustic Britannia with helmet heeling at dignity. The girl's eyes hung to the passing chariot, without movement of her head. It was Aminta who looked back, and she saw the girl looking away. Among the superior dames and damsels she had seen, there was not one to match that figure for stately air, gallant ease, and splendour of pose. Matthew Weyburn would have admired the girl. Aminta did better than envy, she cast off the last vestiges of her bitter ambition to be a fine lady, and winged into the bosom of the girl, and not shyly said "yes" to Matthew Weyburn, and to herself, deep in herself: "A maid has no need to be shy." Hardly blushing, she walks on into the new life beside him, and hears him say: "I in my way, you in yours; we are equals, the stronger for being equals," and she quite agrees, and she gives him the fuller heart for his not requiring her to be absorbed—she is the braver mate for him. Does not that read his meaning? Happiest of the girls of earth, she has divined it at once, from never having had the bitter ambition to be a slave, that she might wear rich tissues; and let herself be fettered, that she might loll in idleness; lose a soul to win a title; escape commonplace to discover it ghastlier under cloth of gold, and the animal crowned, adored, fattened,

utterly served, in the class called by consent of human society the Upper.

Reason whispered a reminder of facts to her.

"But I am not the Countess of Ormont!" she said. She felt herself the girl, her sensations were so intensely simple.

Proceeding to an argument, that the earl did not regard her as the Countess of Ormont, or the ceremony at the British Embassy as one serious and binding, she pushed her reason too far: sweet delusion waned. She waited for some fresh scene to revive it.

Aminta sat unwittingly weaving her destiny.

While she was thus engaged, a carriage was rolling on the more westerly road down to Steignton. Seated in it were Lady Charlotte Eglett and Matthew Weyburn. They had met at Arthur Abner's office the previous day. She went there straight from Lord Ormont's house-agent and upholsterer, to have a queer bit of thunderous news confirmed, that her brother was down at Steignton, refurnishing the house, and not for letting. She was excited: she treated Arthur Abner's closed-volume reticence as a corroboration of the house-agent's report, and hearing Weyburn speak of his anxiety to see the earl immediately, in order to get release from his duties,

proposed a seat in her carriage; for down Steignton way she meant to go, if only as excuse for a view of the old place. She kept asking what Lord Ormont wanted down at Steignton refurnishing the house, and not to let it! Her evasions of answers that plain speculation would supply were quaint. "He hasn't my feeling for Steignton. He could let it—I couldn't. Sacrilege to me to have a tenant in my old home where I was born. He's furnishing to raise his rent. His country won't give him anything to do, so he turns miser. That's my brother Rowsley's way of taking on old age."

Her brother Rowsley might also be showing another sign of his calamitous condition. She said to Weyburn, in the carriage, that her brother Rowsley might like having his hair clipped by the Philistine woman; which is one of the ways of strong men to confess themselves ageing. "Not," said she, with her usual keen justness, "not that I've a word against Delilah. I look upon her as a patriot; she dallied and she used the scissors on behalf of her people. She wasn't bound to Samson in honour,—liked a strong man, probably enough. She proved she liked her country better. The Jews wrote the story of it, so there she stands for posterity to pelt her, poor wretch."

"A tolerably good analogy for the story of men and women generally," said Weyburn.

"Ah, well, you've a right to talk; you don't run miauling about women. It's easy to be squashy on that subject. As for the Jews, I don't go by their history, but now they're down I don't side with the Philistines, or Christians. They're good citizens, and they've got Samson in the brain, too. That comes of persecution, a hard education. They beat the world by counting in the head. That's because they've learnt the value of fractions. Napoleon knew it in war, when he looked to the boots and great-coats of his men; those were his fractions. Lord Ormont thinks he had too hard-and-fast a system for the battle-field."

"A greater strategist than tactician, my lady? It may be," said Weyburn, smiling at her skips.

"Massing his cannon to make a big hole for his cavalry, my brother says; and weeding his infantry for the Imperial Guard he postponed the moment to use."

"At Moskowa?"

"Waterloo. I believe Lord Ormont would—there! his country's lost him, and chose it. They'll have their day for repentance yet. What a rapture to have a thousand horsemen following you! I sup-

pose there never was a man worthy of the name who roared to be a woman. I know I could have shrieked half my life through to have been born male. It's no matter now. When we come to this hateful old age, we meet: no, we're no sex then—we're dry sticks. I'll tell you: my Olmer doctor—that's an impudent fellow who rode by staring into my carriage. The window's down. He could see without pushing his hat in."

Weyburn looked out after a man cantering on.

"A Mr. Morsfield," he said. "I thought it was he when I saw him go by. I've met him at the fencing-rooms. He's one of the violent fencers, good for making his point, if one funks an attack."

"That man Morsfield, is it? I wonder what he's doing on the road here. He goes over London boasting—hum, nothing to me. But he'll find Lord Ormont's arm can protect a poor woman, whatever she is. He'd have had it before, only Lord Ormont shuns a scandal. I was telling you, my Olmer doctor forbade horse-riding, and my husband raised a noise like one of my turkey-cocks on the wing; so I've given up the saddle, to quiet him. I guessed. I went yesterday morning to my London physician. He sounded me, pushed out his mouth and pulled down his nose, recommended avoidance of excite-

ment. 'Is it heart?' I said. He said it was heart. That was the best thing an old woman could hear. He said, when he saw I wasn't afraid, it was likely to be quick; no doctors, no nurses and daily bulletins for inquirers, but just the whites of the eyes, the laying-out, the undertaker, and the family-vault. That's one reason why I want to see Steignton before the blow that may fall any day, whether my brother Rowsley's there or no. But that Olmer doctor of mine, Causitt, Peter Causitt, shall pay me for being a liar or else an ignoramus when I told him he was to tell me bluntly the nature of my disease."

A horseman, in whom they recognised Mr. Morsfield, passed, clattering on the road behind them.

"Some woman hereabout," Lady Charlotte muttered.

Weyburn saw him joined by a cavalier, and the two consulted and pointed whips right and left.

CHAPTER III.

LADY CHARLOTTE'S TRIUMPH.

ONE of the days of sovereign splendour in England was riding down the heavens, and drawing the royal mantle of the gold-fringed shadows over plain and wavy turf, blue water and woods of the country round Steignton. A white mansion shone to a length of oblong lake that held the sun-ball suffused in mild yellow.

"There's the place," Lady Charlotte said to Weyburn, as they had view of it at a turn of the park. She said to herself—where I was born and bred! and her sight gloated momentarily on the house and side avenues, a great plane standing to the right of the house, the sparkle of a little river running near; all the scenes she knew, all young and lively. She sprang on her seat for a horse beneath her, and said, "But this is healthy excitement," as in reply to her London physician's remonstrances. "And there's my brother Rowsley, talking to one of the keepers," she cried. "You see Lord Ormont?

I can see a mile. Sight doesn't fail with me. He's insisting. 'Ware poachers when Rowsley's on his ground! You smell the air here? Nobody dies round about Steignton. Their legs wear out and they lie down to rest them. It's the finest air in the world. Now look, the third window left of the porch, first floor. That was my room before I married. Strangers have been here, and called the place home. It can never be home to any but me and Rowsley. He sees the carriage. He little thinks! He's dressed in his white corduroy and knee-breeches. Age! he won't know age till he's ninety. Here he comes marching. He can't bear surprises. I'll wave my hand and call."

She called his name.

In a few strides he was at the carriage window. "You, Charlotte?"

"Home again, Rowsley! Bring down your eyebrows, and let me hear you're glad I've come."

"What made you expect you would find me here?"

"Anything — cats on the tiles at night. You can't keep a secret from me. Here's Mr. Weyburn, good enough to be my escort. I'll get out."

She alighted, scorning help; Weyburn at her heels.

The earl nodded to him politely and not cordially. He was hardly cordial to Lady Charlotte.

That had no effect on her. "A glorious day for Steignton," she said. "Ah, there's the Buridon group of beeches; grander trees than grow at Buridon. Old timber now. I knew them slim as demoiselles. Where's the ash? We had a splendid ash on the west side."

"Dead and cut down long since," replied the earl.

"So we go!"

She bent her steps to the spot; a grass-covered heave of the soil.

"Dear old tree!" she said, in a music of elegy: and to Weyburn: "Looks like a stump of an arm lopped off a shoulder in bandages. Nature does it so. All the tenants doing well, Rowsley?"

"About the same amount of trouble with them."

"Ours at Olmer get worse."

"It's a process for the extirpation of the landlords."

"Then down goes the country."

"They've got their case, their papers tell us."

"I know they have; but we've got the soil, and we'll make a fight of it."

"They can fight too, they say."

"I should be sorry to think they couldn't if they're Englishmen."

She spoke so like his old Charlotte of the younger days that her brother partly laughed.

"Parliamentary fighting's not much to your taste or mine. They've lost their stomach for any other. The battle they enjoy is the battle that goes for the majority. Gauge their valour by that."

"To be sure," said his responsive sister. She changed her note. "But what I say is, let the nobles keep together and stick to their class. There's nothing to fear then. They must marry among themselves, think of the blood; it's their first duty. Or better a peasant girl! Middle courses dilute it to the stuff in a publican's tankard. It's an adulterous beast who thinks of mixing old wine with anything."

"Hulloa!" said the earl; and she drew up.

"You'll have me here till over to-morrow, Rowsley, so that I may have one clear day at Steignton?"

He bowed. "You will choose your room. Mr. Weyburn is welcome."

Weyburn stated the purport of his visit, and was allowed to name an early day for the end of his term of service.

Entering the house, Lady Charlotte glanced at the armour and stag-branches decorating corners of

the hall, and straightway laid her head forward, pushing after it in the direction of the drawing-room. She went in, stood for a minute, and came out. Her mouth was hard shut.

At dinner she had tales of uxorious men, of men who married mistresses, of the fearful incubus the vulgar family of a woman of the inferior classes ever must be; and her animadversions were strong in the matter of gew-gaw modern furniture. The earl submitted to hear.

She was, however, keenly attentive whenever he proffered any item of information touching Steignton.

After dinner Weyburn strolled to the points of view she cited as excellent for different aspects of her old home.

He found her waiting to hear his laudation when he came back; and in the early morning she was on the terrace, impatient to lead him down to the lake. There, at the boat-house, she commanded him to loosen a skiff and give her a paddle. Between exclamations, designed to waken louder from him and not so successful as her cormorant hunger for praise of Steignton required, she plied him to confirm with his opinion an opinion that her reasoning mind had almost formed in the close neighbourhood of the beloved and honoured person providing

it; for abstract ideas were unknown to her. She put it, however, as in the abstract:—

"How is it we meet people brave as lions before an enemy, and rank cowards where there's a botheration among their friends at home? And tell me, too, if you've thought the thing over, what's the meaning of this? I've met men in high places, and they've risen to distinction by their own efforts, and they head the nation. Right enough, you'd say. Well, I talk with them, and I find they've left their brains on the ladder that led them up; they've only the ideas of their grandfather on general subjects. I come across a common peasant or craftsman, and he down there has a mind more open—he's wiser in his intelligence than his rulers and lawgivers up above him. He understands what I say, and I learn from him. I don't learn much from our senators, or great lawyers, great doctors, professors, members of governing bodies—that lot. Policy seems to petrify their minds when they've got on an eminence. Now explain it, if you can."

"Responsibility has a certain effect on them, no doubt," said Weyburn. "Eminent station among men doesn't give a larger outlook. Most of them confine their observation to their supports. It happens to be one of the questions I have thought over.

Here in England, and particularly on a fortnight's run in the lowlands of Scotland once, I have, like you, my lady, come now and then across the people we call common, men and women, old wayside men especially; slow-minded, but hard in their grasp of facts, and ready to learn, and logical, large in their ideas, though going a roundabout way to express them. They were at the bottom of wisdom, for they had in their heads the delicate sense of justice, upon which wisdom is founded. That is what their rulers lack. Unless we have the sense of justice abroad like a common air, there's no peace, and no steady advance. But these humble people had it. They reasoned from it, and came to sound conclusions. I felt them to be my superiors. On the other hand, I have not felt the same with 'our senators, rulers, and lawgivers.' They are for the most part deficient in the liberal mind."

"Ha! good, so far. How do you account for it?" said Lady Charlotte.

"I read it in this way: that the world being such as it is at present, demanding and rewarding with honours and pay special services, the men called great, who have risen to distinction, are not men of brains, but the men of aptitudes. These men of aptitudes have a poor conception of the facts of life

to meet the necessities of modern expansion. They are serviceable in departments. They go as they are driven, or they resist. In either case, they explain how it is that we have a world moving so sluggishly. They are not the men of brains, the men of insight and outlook. Often enough they are foes of the men of brains."

"Aptitudes; yes, that flashes a light into me," said Lady Charlotte. "I see it better. It helps to some comprehension of their muddle. A man may be a first-rate soldier, doctor, banker—as we cal the usurer now-a-days—or brewer, orator, anything that leads up to a figure-head, and prove a foolish fellow if you sound him. I've thought something like it, but wanted the word. They say themselves, 'Get to know, and you see with what little wisdom the world is governed!' You explain how it is. I shall carry 'aptitudes' away."

She looked straight at Weyburn. "If I were a younger woman I could kiss you for it."

He bowed to her very gratefully.

"Remember, my lady, there's a good deal of the Reformer in that definition."

"I stick to my class. But they shall hear a true word when there's one abroad, I can tell them. That reminds me—you ought to have asked: let me

tell you I'm friendly with the Rev. Mr. Hampton-Evey. We had a wrestle for half an hour, and I threw him and helped him up, and he apologised for tumbling, and I subscribed to one of his charities, and gave up about the pew, but had an excuse for not sitting under the sermon. A poor good creature. He's got the aptitudes for his office. He won't do much to save his Church. I knew another who had his aptitude for the classics, and he has mounted. He was my tutor when I was a girl. He was fond of declaiming passages from Lucian and Longus and Ovid. One day he was at it with a piece out of Daphnis and Chloe, and I said, 'Now translate.' He fetched a gurgle to say he couldn't, and I slapped his cheek. Will you believe it? the man was indignant. I told him, if he would like to know why I behaved in 'that unmaidenly way,' he had better apply at home. I had no further intimations of his classical aptitudes; but he took me for a cleverer pupil than I was. I hadn't a notion of the stuff he recited. I read by his face. That was my aptitude—always has been. But think of the donkeys parents are when they let a man have a chance of pouring his barley-sugar and sulphur into the ears of a girl. Lots of girls have no latent heckles and prickles to match his villany.—There's

my brother come back to breakfast from a round. You and I'll have a drive before lunch, and a ride or a stroll in the afternoon. There's a lot to see. I mean you to get the whole place into your head. I've ordered the phaeton, and you shall take the whip, with me beside you. That's how my husband and I spent three-quarters of our honeymoon."

Each of the three breakfasted alone.

They met on the terrace. It was easily perceived that Lord Ormont stood expecting an assault at any instant; prepared also to encounter and do battle with his redoubtable sister. Only he wished to defer the engagement. And he was magnanimous: he was in the right, she in the wrong; he had no desire to grapple with her, fling and humiliate. The Sphinx of Mrs. Pagnell had been communing with himself unwontedly during the recent weeks.

What was the riddle of him? That, he did not read. But, expecting an assault, and relieved by his sister Charlotte's departure with Weyburn, he went to the drawing-room, where he had seen her sniff her strong suspicions of a lady coming to throne it. Charlotte could believe that he flouted the world with a beautiful young woman on his arm; she would not believe him capable of doing that in his family home and native county; so, then, her shrewd wits

had nothing or little to learn. But her vehement fighting against facts; her obstinate aristocratic prejudices, which he shared; her stinger of a tongue: these in ebullition formed a discomforting prospect. The battle might as well be conducted through the post. Come, it must!

Even her writing of the pointed truths she would deliver was an unpleasant anticipation. His ears heated. Undoubtedly he could crush her. Yet, supposing her to speak to his ears, she would say; "You married a young woman, and have been foiling and fooling her ever since, giving her half a title to the name of wife, and allowing her in consequence to be wholly disfigured before the world—your family naturally her chief enemies, who would otherwise (Charlotte would proclaim it) have been her friends. What! your intention was (one could hear Charlotte's voice) to smack the world in the face, and you smacked your young wife's instead!"

His intention had been nothing of the sort. He had married, in a foreign city, a young woman who adored him, whose features, manners, and carriage of her person satisfied his exacting taste in the sex; and he had intended to cast gossipy England over the rail and be a traveller for the remainder of his days. And at the first she had acquiesced, tacitly

accepted it as part of the contract. He bore with the burden of an intolerable aunt of hers for her sake. The two fell to work to conspire. Aminta "tired of travelling," Aminta must have a London house. She continually expressed a hope that "she might set her eyes on Steignton some early day." In fact, she as good as confessed her scheme to plot for the acknowledged position of Countess of Ormont in the English social world. That was a distinct breach of the contract.

As to the babble of the London world about a "very young wife," he scorned it completely, but it belonged to the calculation. "A very handsome young wife," would lay commands on a sexagenarian vigilance while adding to his physical glory. The latter he could forego among a people he despised. It would, however, be an annoyance to stand constantly hand upon sword-hilt.

There was, besides, the conflict with his redoubtable sister. He had no dread of it, in contemplation of the necessity; he could crush his Charlotte. The objection was, that his Aminta should be pressing him to do it.

Examine the situation at present. Aminta has all the needs—every luxury. Her title as Countess

of Ormont is not denied. Her husband justly refuses to put foot into English society. She, choosing to go where she may be received, dissociates herself from him, and he does not complain. She does complain. There is a difference between the two.

He had always shunned the closer yoke with a woman because of these vexatious dissensions. For not only are women incapable of practising, they cannot comprehend magnanimity.

Lord Ormont's argumentative reverie to the above effect had been pursued over and over. He knew that the country which broke his military career and ridiculed his newspaper controversy was unforgiven by him. He did not reflect on the consequences of such an unpardoning spirit in its operation on his mind.

If he could but have passed the injury, he would ultimately—for his claims of service were admitted—have had employment of some kind. Inoccupation was poison to him; travel juggled with his malady of restlessness; really, a compression of the warrior's natural forces. His Aminta, pushed to it by the woman Pagnell, declined to help him in softening the virulence of the disease. She would not travel; she would fix in this London of theirs, and scheme to be hailed the accepted Countess of Ormont. She

manœuvred; she threw him on the veteran soldier's instinct, and it resulted spontaneously that he manœuvred.

Hence their game of Pull, which occupied him a little, tickled him and amused. The watching of her pretty infantile tactics amused him too much to permit of a sidethought on the cruelty of the part he played. She had every luxury, more than her station by right of birth would have supplied.

But he was astonished to find that his Aminta proved herself clever, though she had now and then said something pointed. She was in awe of him; notwithstanding which, clearly she meant to win and pull him over. He did not dislike her for it; she might use her weapons to play her game; and that she should bewitch men—a man like Morsfield—was not wonderful. On the other hand, her conquest of Mrs. Lawrence Finchley scored tellingly: that was unaccountably queer. What did Mrs. Lawrence expect to gain? the sage lord asked. He had not known women devoid of a positive practical object of their own when they bestirred themselves to do a friendly deed.

Thanks to her conquest of Mrs. Lawrence, his Aminta was gaining ground—daily she made an

advance; insomuch that he had heard of himself as harshly blamed in London for not having countenanced her recent and rather imprudent move. In other words, whenever she gave a violent tug at their game of Pull, he was expected to second it. But the world of these English is too monstrously stupid in what it expects, for any of its extravagances to be followed by interjections.

All the while he was trimming and rolling a field of armistice at Steignton, where they could discuss the terms he had a right to dictate, having yielded so far. Would she be satisfied with the rule of his ancestral hall, and the dispensing of hospitalities to the county? No, one may guess: no woman is ever satisfied. But she would have to relinquish her game, counting her good round half of the honours. Somewhat more, on the whole. Without beating, she certainly had accomplished the miracle of bending him. To time and a wife it is no disgrace for a man to bend. It is the form of submission of the bulrush to the wind, of courtesy in the cavalier to a lady.

"Oh, here you are, Rowsley," Lady Charlotte exclaimed at the drawing-room door. "Well, and I don't like those Louis Quinze cabinets; and that modern French mantelpiece clock is hideous. You

seem to furnish in downright contempt of the women you invite to sit in the room. Lord help the wretched woman playing hostess in such a pinchbeck bric-à-brac shop, if there were one! She's spared, at all events."

He stepped at slow march to one of the five windows. Lady Charlotte went to another near by. She called to Weyburn—

"We had a regatta on that water when Lord Ormont came of age. I took an oar in one of the boats, and we won a prize; and when I was landing I didn't stride enough to the spring-plank, and plumped in."

Some labourers of the estate passed in front.

Lord Ormont gave out a broken laugh. "See those fellows walk! That's the raw material of the famous English infantry. They bend their knees five-and-forty degrees for every stride; and when you drill them out of that, they're stiff as ramrods. I gymnasticised them in my regiment. I'd have challenged any French regiment to out-walk or out-jump us, or any crack Tyrolese Jägers to out-climb, though we were cavalry."

"Yes, my lord, and exercised crack corps are wanted with us," Weyburn replied. "The English

authorities are adverse to it, but it's against nature —on the supposition that all Englishmen might enrol untrained in Cæsar's pet legion. Virgil shows knowledge of men when he says of the row-boat straining in emulation, *Possunt quia posse videntur.*"

He talked on rapidly; he wondered that he did not hear Lady Charlotte exclaim at what she must be seeing.

From the nearest avenue a lady had issued. She stood gazing at the house, erect—a gallant figure of a woman—one hand holding her parasol, the other at her hip. He knew her. She was a few paces ahead of Mrs. Pagnell, beside whom a gentleman walked.

The cry came: "It's that man Morsfield! Who brings that man Morsfield here? He hunted me on the road; he seemed to be on the wrong scent. Who are those women? Rowsley, are your grounds open every day of the week? She threatens to come in!"

Lady Charlotte had noted that the foremost and younger of "those women" understood how to walk and how to dress to her shape and colour. She inclined to think she was having to do with an intrepid foreign-bred minx.

Aminta had been addressed by one of her companions, and had hastened forward. It looked like the beginning of a run to enter the house.

Mrs. Pagnell ran after her. She ran cow-like.

The earl's gorge rose at the spectacle Charlotte was observing.

With Morsfield he could have settled accounts at any moment, despatching Aminta to her chamber for an hour. He had, though he was offended, an honourable guess that she had not of her free will travelled with the man and brought him into the grounds. It was the presence of the intolerable Pagnell under Charlotte's eyes which irritated him beyond the common anger he felt at Aminta's pursuit of him right into Steignton. His mouth locked. Lady Charlotte needed no speech from him for sign of the boiling; she was too wary to speak while that went on.

He said to Weyburn, loud enough for his Charlotte to hear: "Do me the favour to go to the Countess of Ormont. Conduct her back to London. You will say it is my command. Inform Mr. Morsfield, with my compliments, I regret I have no weapons here. I understand him to complain of having to wait. I shall be in town three days from this date."

"My lord," said Mr. Weyburn; and actually he did mean to supplicate. He could imagine seeing Lord Ormont's eyebrows rising to alpine heights.

Lady Charlotte seized his arm.

"Go at once. Do as you are told. I'll have your portmanteau packed and sent after you—the phaeton's out in the yard—to Rowsley, or Ashead, or Dornton, wherever they put up. Now go, or we shall have hot work. Keep your head on, and go."

He went, without bowing.

Lady Charlotte rang for the footman.

The earl and she watched the scene on the sward below the terrace.

Aminta listened to Weyburn. Evidently there was no expostulation.

But it was otherwise with Mrs. Pagnell. She flung wild arms of a semaphore signalling national events. She sprang before Aminta to stop her retreat, and stamped and gibbed, for sign that she would not be driven. She fell away to Mr. Morsfield, for simple hearing of her plaint. He appeared emphatic. There was a passage between him and Weyburn.

"I suspect you've more than your match in young Weyburn, Mr. Morsfield," Lady Charlotte said,

measuring them as they stood together. They turned at last.

"You shall drive back to town with me, Rowsley," said the fighting dame.

She breathed no hint of her triumph.

CHAPTER IV.

A SCENE ON THE ROAD BACK.

AFTER refusing to quit the grounds of Steignton, in spite of the proprietor, Mrs. Pagnell burst into an agitation to have them be at speed, that they might "shake the dust of the place from the soles of their feet"; and she hurried past Aminta and Lord Ormont's insolent emissary, carrying Mr. Morsfield beside her, perforce of a series of imperiously-toned vacuous questions, to which he listened in rigid politeness, with the ejaculation steaming off from time to time, "A scandal!"

He shot glances behind.

Mrs. Pagnell was going too fast. She, however, would not hear of a halt, and she was his main apology for being present; he was excruciatingly attached to the horrid woman.

Weyburn spoke the commonplaces about regrets to Aminta.

"Believe me, it is long since I have been so happy," she said.

She had come out of her stupefaction, and she wore no theatrical looks of cheerfulness.

"I regret that you should be dragged away. But, if you say you do not mind, it will be pleasant to me. I can excuse Lord Ormont's anger. I was ignorant of his presence here. I thought him in Paris. I supposed the place empty. I wished to see it once. I travelled as the niece of Mrs. Pagnell. She is a little infatuated. . . . Mr. Morsfield heard of our expedition through her. I changed the route. I was not in want of a defender. I could have defended myself in case of need. We slept at Ashead, two hours from Steignton. He and a friend accompanied us, not with my consent. Lord Ormont could not have been aware of that. These accidental circumstances happen. There may be pardonable intentions on all sides."

She smiled. Her looks were open, and her voice light and spirited; though the natural dark rose-glow was absent from her olive cheeks.

Weyburn puzzled over the mystery of so volatile a treatment of a serious matter, on the part of a woman whose feelings he had reason to know were quick and deep. She might be acting, as women so cleverly do.

It could hardly be acting when she pointed to peeps of scenery, with a just eye for landscape.

"You leave us for Switzerland very soon?" she said.

"The Reversion I have been expecting has fallen in, besides my inheritance. My mother was not to see the school. But I shall not forget her counsels. I can now make my purchase of the house and buildings, and buy out my partner at the end of a year. My boys are jumping to start. I had last week a letter from Emile."

"Dear little Emile!"

"You like him?"

"I could use a warmer word. He knew me when I was a girl."

She wound the strings of his heart suddenly tense, and they sang to their quivering.

"You will let me hear of you, Mr. Weyburn?"

"I will write. Oh! certainly I will write, if I am told you are interested in our doings, Lady Ormont."

"I will let you know that I am."

"I shall be happy in writing full reports."

"Every detail, I beg. All concerning the school. Help me to feel I am a boarder. I catch up an old sympathy I had for girls and boys. For boys!

any boys! the dear monkey boys! cherub monkeys! They are so funny. I am sure I never have laughed as I did at Selina Collett's report, through her brother, of the way the boys tried to take to my name; and their sneezing at it, like a cat at a deceitful dish. 'Aminta'—was that their way?"

"Something—the young rascals!"

"But please repeat it as you heard them."

"'Aminta.'"

He subdued the mouthing.

"It didn't offend me at all. It is one of my amusements to think of it. But after a time they liked the name; and then how did they say it?"

He had the beloved Aminta on his lips.

He checked it, or the power to speak it failed.

She drew in a sharp breath.

"I hope your boys will have plenty of fun in them. They will have you for a providence and a friend. I should wish to propose to visit your school some day. You will keep me informed whether the school has vacancies. You will, please, keep me regularly informed?"

She broke into sobs.

Weyburn talked on of the school, for a cover to the resuming of her fallen mask, as he fancied it.

She soon recovered, all save a steady voice for

converse, and begged him to proceed, and spoke in the flow of the subject; but the quaver of her tones was a cause of further melting. The tears poured, she could not explain why, beyond assuring him that they were no sign of unhappiness. Winds on the great waters against a strong tidal current beat up the wave and shear and wing the spray, as in Aminta's bosom. Only she could know that it was not her heart weeping, though she had grounds for a woman's weeping. But she alone could be aware of her heart's running counter to the tears.

Her agitation was untimely. Both Mrs. Pagnell and Mr. Morsfield observed emotion at work. And who could wonder? A wife denied the admittance to her husband's house by her husband! The most beautiful woman of her time relentlessly humiliated, ordered to journey back the way she had come!

They had reached the gate of the park, and had turned.

"A scandal!"

Mr. Morsfield renewed his interjection vehemently, for an apology to his politeness in breaking from Mrs. Pagnell.

Joining the lady, whose tears were of the nerves, he made offer of his devotion in any shape; and she was again in the plight to which a desperado can

push a woman of the gentle kind. She had the fear of provoking a collision if she reminded him, that despite her entreaties, he had compelled her, seconded by her aunt as he had been, to submit to his absurd protection on the walk across the park.

He seemed quite regardless of the mischief he had created; and, reflecting upon how it served his purpose, he might well be. Intemperate lover, of the ancient pattern, that he was, his aim to win the woman acknowledged no obstacle in the means. Her pitiable position appealed to the best of him; his inordinate desire of her aroused the worst. It was, besides, an element of his coxcombry, that he should, in apeing the utterly inconsiderate, rush swiftly to impersonate it when his passions were cast on a die.

Weyburn he ignored as a stranger, an intruder, an inferior.

Aminta's chariot was at the gate.

She had to resign herself to the chances of a clash of men, and, as there were two to one, she requested help of Weyburn's hand, that he might be near her.

A mounted gentleman, smelling parasite in his bearing, held the bridle of Morsfield's horse.

The ladies having entered the chariot, Morsfield

sprang to the saddle, and said: "You, sir, had better stretch your legs to the inn."

"There is room for you, Mr. Weyburn," said Aminta.

Mrs. Pagnell puffed.

"I can't think we've room, my dear. I want that bit of seat in front for my feet."

Morsfield kicked at his horse's flanks, and between Weyburn and the chariot step, cried: "Back, sir!"

His reins were seized, the horse reared, the unexpected occurred.

Weyburn shouted "Off!" to the postillion, and jumped in.

Morsfield was left to the shaking of a dusty coat, while the chariot rolled its gentle course down the leafy lane into the high-road.

His friend had seized the horse's bridle-reins; and he remarked: "I say, Dolf, we don't prosper to-day."

"He pays for it!" said Morsfield, foot in stirrup. "You'll take him and trounce him at the inn. I don't fight with servants. Better game. One thing, Cumnock: the fellow's clever at the foils."

"Foils to the devil! If I tackle the fellow, it won't be with the buttons. But how has he pushed in?"

Morsfield reported "the scandal" in sharp headings.

"Turned her away. Won't have her enter his house—grandest woman in all England! Sent his dog to guard. Think of it for an insult. It's insult upon insult. I've done my utmost to fire his marrow. I did myself a good turn by following her up and entering that park with her. I shall succeed; there's a look of it. All I have—my life—is that woman's. I never knew what this devil's torture was before I saw her."

His friend was concerned for his veracity.

"Amy!"

"A common spotted snake. She caught me young, and she didn't carry me off, as I mean to carry off this glory of her sex—she is: you've seen her!—and free her, and devote every minute of the rest of my days to her. I say I must win the woman if I stop at nothing, or I perish; and if it's a failure, exit's my road. I've watched every atom she touched in a room, and would have heaped gold to have the chairs, tables, cups, carpets, mine. I have two short letters written with her hand. I'd give two of my estates for two more. If I were a beggar, and kept them, I should be rich. Relieve me of that dog, and I toss you a thousand-pound note, and thank

you from my soul, Cumnock. You know what hangs on it. Spur, you dolt, or she'll be out of sight."

They cantered upon application of the spur. Captain Cumnock was an impecunious fearless rascal, therefore a parasite and a bully duellist; a thick-built north-countryman; a burly ape of the ultra-elegant; hunter, gamester, hard-drinker, man of pleasure. His known readiness to fight was his trump-card at a period when the declining custom of the duel taxed men's courage to brave the law and the Puritan in the interests of a privileged and menaced aristocracy. An incident like the present was the passion in the dice-box to Cumnock. Morsfield was of the order of men who can be generous up to the pitch of their desires. Consequently, the world accounted him open-handed and devoted when enamoured. Few men liked him; he was a hero with some women. The women he trampled on; the men he despised. To the lady of his choice he sincerely offered his fortune and his life for the enjoyment of her favour. His ostentation and his offensive daring combined the characteristics of the peacock and the hawk. Always near upon madness, there were occasions when he could eclipse the insane. He had a ringing renown in his class.

Chariot and horsemen arrived at the Roebuck

Arms at the centre of the small town of Ashead, on the line from Steignton through Rowsley. The pair of cavaliers dismounted and hustled Weyburn in assisting the ladies to descend.

The ladies entered the inn; they declined refection of any sort. They had biscuits and sweetmeats, and looked forward to tea at a farther stage. Captain Cumnock stooped to their verdict on themselves, with marvel at the quantity of flesh they managed to put on their bones from such dieting.

"By your courtesy, sir, a word with you in the inn-yard, if you please," he said to Weyburn in the inn-porch.

Weyburn answered, "half a minute," and was informed that it was exactly the amount of time the captain could afford to wait.

Weyburn had seen the Steignton phaeton and coachman in the earl's light-blue livery. It was at his orders, he heard. He told the coachman to expect him shortly, and he followed the captain, with a heavy trifle of suspicion that some brew was at work. He said to Aminta in the passage—

"You have your settlement with the innkeeper. Don't, I beg, step into the chariot till you see me."

"Anything?" said she.

"Only prudence."

"Our posting horses will be harnessed soon, I hope. I burn to get away."

Mrs. Pagnell paid the bill at the bar of the inn. Morsfield poured out for the injured countess or no-countess a dram of the brandy of passion, under the breath.

"Deny that you singled me once for your esteem. Hardest-hearted of the women of earth and dearest! deny that you gave me reason to hope—and now! I have ridden in your track all this way for the sight of you, as you know, and you kill me with frost. Yes, I rejoice that we were seen together. Look on me. I swear I perish for one look of kindness. You have been shamefully used, madam."

"It seems to me I am being so," said Aminta, cutting herself loose from the man of the close eyes that wavered as they shot the dart.

Her action was too decided for him to follow her up under the observation of the inn windows and a staring street.

Mrs. Pagnell came out. She went boldly to Morsfield and they conferred. He was led by her to the chariot, where she pointed to a small padded slab of a seat back to the horses. Turning to the bar, he said: "My friend will look to my horse. Both

want watering and a bucketful. There!"—he threw silver—"I have to protect the ladies."

Aminta was at the chariot door talking to her aunt inside.

"But I say I have been insulted—is the word—more than enough by Lord Ormont to-day!" Mrs. Pagnell exclaimed; "and I won't, I positively refuse to ride up to London with any servant of his. It's quite sufficient that it's his servant. I'm not titled, but I'm not quite dirt. Mr. Morsfield kindly offers his protection, and I accept. He is company."

Nodding and smirking at Morsfield's approach, she entreated Aminta to step up and in, for the horses were coming out of the yard.

Aminta looked round. Weyburn was perceived; and Morsfield's features cramped at thought of a hitch in the plot.

"Possession," Mrs. Pagnell murmured significantly. She patted the seat. Morsfield sprang to Weyburn's place.

That was witnessed by Aminta and Weyburn. She stepped to consult him. He said to the earl's coachman—a young fellow with a bright eye for orders—

"Drive as fast as you can pelt for Dornton. I'm doing my lord's commands."

"Trust yourself to me, madam." His hand stretched for Aminta to mount. She took it without a word and climbed to the seat. A clatter of hoofs rang out with the crack of the whip. They were away behind a pair of steppers that could go the pace.

CHAPTER V.

THE PURSUERS.

For promptitude, the lady, the gentleman, and the coachman were in such unison as to make it a reasonable deduction that the flight had been concerted.

Never did any departure from the Roebuck leave so wide-mouthed a body of spectators. Mrs. Pagnell's shrieks of "Stop, oh! stop!" to the backs of the coachman and Aminta were continued until they were far down the street. She called to the innkeeper, called to the landlady and to invisible constables for help. But her pangs were childish compared with Morsfield's, who, with the rage of a conceited schemer tricked and the fury of a lover beholding the rape of his beautiful, bellowed impotently at Weyburn and the coachman out of hearing, "Stop! you!" He was in the state of men who believe that there is a virtue in imprecations, and he shot loud oaths after them, shook his fist, cursed his friend Cumnock, whose name he vociferated as a

nmons to him,—generally the baffled plotter misnducted himself to an extreme degree, that might ve apprised Mrs. Pagnell of a more than legitimate sappointment on his part.

Pursuit was one of the immediate ideas which ush forward to look back woefully on impediments nd fret to fever over the tardiness of operations. A glance at the thing of wrinkles receiving orders to buckle at his horses and pursue convinced them of the hopelessness; and Morsfield was pricked to intensest hatred of the woman by hearing the dire exclamation, "One night, and her character's gone!"

"Be quiet, ma'am, if you please, or nothing can be done," he cried.

"I tell you, Mr. Morsfield—don't you see?—he has thrown them together. It is Lord Ormont's wicked conspiracy to rid himself of her. A secretary! He'll beat any one alive in plots. She can't show her face in London after this, if you don't overtake her. And she might have seen Lord Ormont's plot to ruin her. He tired of her, and was ashamed of her inferior birth to his own, after the first year, except on the Continent, where she had her rights. Me he never forgave for helping make him the happy man he might have been in spite of his age. For she is lovely! But it's worse for a lovely woman

vith a damaged reputation. And that's his cunning. Iow she could be so silly as to play into it! She :an't have demeaned herself to look on that secretary! said from the first he seemed as if thrown into ıer way for a purpose. But she has pride: my niece \minta has pride. She might well have listened o flatterers—she had every temptation—if it hadn't ɔeen for her pride. It may save her yet. How-:ver good-looking, she will remember her dignity —unless he's a villain. Runnings away! drivings ogether! inns! oh! the story over London! I do ɔelieve she has a true friend in you, Mr. Morsfield; ınd I say, as I have said before, the sight of a de-voted admirer would have brought any husband of *more* than sixty to his senses, if he hadn't hoped ı catastrophe and determined on it. Catch them we can't, unless she repents and relents; and prayers for that are our only resource. Now, start, man, do!"

The postillion had his foot in position to spring.

Morsfield bawled Cumnock's name, and bestrode his horse. Captain Cumnock emerged from the inn-yard with a dubitative step, pressing a handkerchief to his nose, blinking, and scrutinising the persistent fresh stains on it.

Stable-boys were at the rear. These, ducking

and springing, surcharged and copious exponents of the play they had seen, related, for the benefit of the town, how that the two gentlemen had exchanged words in the yard, which were about beastly pistols, which the slim gentleman would have none of; and then the big one trips up, like dancing, to the other one and flicks him a soft clap on the cheek—quite friendly, you may say; and, before he can square to it, the slim one he steps his hind leg half a foot back, and he drives a straight left like lightning of the shoulder slick on to t'other one's nob, and over he rolls, like a cart with the shafts up down a bank; and he's been washing his "chops" and threatening bullets ever since.

The exact account of the captain's framework in the process of the fall was graphically portrayed in our blunt and racy vernacular, which a society nourished upon Norman-English and English-Latin banishes from print, largely to its impoverishment, some think.

By the time the primary narrative of the encounter in the inn yard had given ground for fancy and ornament to present it in yet more luscious dress, Lord Ormont's phaeton was a good mile on the road. Morsfield and Captain Cumnock—the latter inquisitive of the handkerchief pressed occa-

sionally at his nose—trotted on tired steeds along dusty wheel-tracks. Mrs. Pagnell was the solitary of the chariot, having a horrid couple of loaded pistols to intimidate her for her protection, and the provoking back view of a regularly jogging mannikin under a big white hat with blue riband, who played the part of Time in dragging her along, with worse than no countenance for her anxieties.

News of the fugitives was obtained at the rampant Red Lion in Dudsworth, nine miles on along the London road, to the extent that the Earl of Ormont's phaeton, containing a lady and a gentleman, had stopped there a minute to send back word to Steignton of their comfortable progress, and expectation of crossing the borders into Hampshire before sunset. Morsfield and Cumnock shrugged at the bumpkin artifice. They left their line of route to be communicated to the chariot, and chose, with practised acumen, that very course, which was the main road, and rewarded them at the end of half an hour with sight of the Steignton phaeton.

But it was returning. A nearer view showed it empty of the couple.

Morsfield bade the coachman pull up, and he was readily obeyed. Answers came briskly.

Although provincial acting is not of the high

class which conceals the art, this man's look beside him and behind him at vacant seats had incontestable evidence in support of his declaration, that the lady and gentleman had gone on by themselves: the phaeton was a box of flown birds.

"Where did you say they got out, you dog?" said Cumnock.

The coachman stood up to spy a point below. "Down there at the bottom of the road, to the right, where there's a stile across the meadows, making a short cut by way of a bridge over the river to Busley and North Tothill, on the high-road to Hocklebourne. The lady and gentleman thought they'd walk for a bit of exercise the remains of the journey."

"Can't prove the rascal's a liar," Cumnock said to Morsfield, who rallied him savagely on his lucky escape from another knock-down blow, and tossed silver on the seat, and said—

"We'll see if there is a stile."

"You'll see the stile, sir," rejoined the man, and winked at their backs.

Both cavaliers, being famished besides baffled, were in sour tempers, expecting to see just the dead wooden stile, and see it as a grin at them. Cumnock called on Jove to witness that they had been

donkeys enough to forget to ask the driver how far round on the road it was to the other end of the cross-cut.

Morsfield, entirely objecting to asinine harness with him, mocked at his invocation and intonation of the name of Jove.

Cumnock was thereupon stung to a keen recollection of the allusion to his knock-down blow, and he retorted that there were some men whose wit was the parrot's.

Morsfield complimented him over the exhibition of a vastly superior and more serviceable wit, in losing sight of his antagonist after one trial of him.

Cumnock protested that the loss of time was caused by his friend's dalliance with the Venus in the chariot.

Morsfield's gall seethed at a flying picture of Mrs. Pagnell, coupled with the retarding reddened handkerchief business, and he recommended Cumnock to pay court to the old woman, as the only chance he would have of acquaintanceship with the mother of Love.

Upon that Cumnock confessed in humility to his not being wealthy. Morsfield looked a willingness to do the deed he might have to pay for in tenderer

places than the pocket, and named the head as a seat of poverty with him.

Cumnock then yawned a town fop's advice to a hustling street passenger to apologize for his rudeness before it was too late. Whereat Morsfield, certain that his parasitic thrasyleon apeing coxcomb would avoid extremities, mimicked him execrably.

Now this was a second breach of the implied convention existing among the exquisitely fine-bred silken-slender on the summits of our mundane sphere, which demands of them all, that they respect one another's affectations. It is commonly done, and so the costly people of a single pattern contrive to push forth, flatteringly to themselves, luxuriant shoots of individuality in their orchidean glass-house. A violation of the rule is a really deadly personal attack. Captain Cumnock was particularly sensitive regarding it, inasmuch as he knew himself not the natural performer he strove to be, and a mimicry affected him as a haunting check.

He burst out: "Damned if I don't understand why you're hated by men and women both!"

Morsfield took a shock. "Infernal hornet!" he muttered; for his conquests had their secret history.

"May and his wife have a balance to pay will trip you yet, you'll find."

"Reserve your wrath, sir, for the man who stretched you on your back."

The batteries of the two continued exchanging red-hot shots, with the effect, that they had to call to mind they were looking at the stile. A path across a buttercup meadow was beyond it. They were damped to some coolness by the sight.

"Upon my word, the trick seems neat!" said Cumnock, staring at the pastoral curtain.

"Whose trick?" he was asked sternly.

"Here or there's not much matter; they're off, unless they're under a hedge laughing."

An ache of jealousy and spite was driven through the lover, who groaned, and presently said—

"I ride on. That old woman can follow. I don't want to hear her gibberish. We've lost the game—there's no reckoning the luck. If there's a chance, it's this way. It smells a trick. He and she—by all the devils! It has been done in my family—might have been done again. Tell the men on the plain they can drive home. There's a hundred-pound weight on your tongue for silence."

Cumnock cried: "But we needn't be parting, Dolf! Stick together. Bad luck's not repeated every day. Keep heart for the good."

"My heart's shattered, Cumnock. I say it's im-

possible she can love a husband twice her age, who treats her—you've seen. Contempt of that lady! By heaven! once in my power, I swear she would have been sacred to me. But she would have been compelled to face the public and take my hand. I swear she would have been congratulated on the end of her sufferings. Worship!—that's what I feel. No woman ever alive had eyes in her head like that lady's. I repeat her name ten times every night before I go to sleep. If I had her hand, no, not one kiss would I press on it without her sanction. I could be in love with her cruelty, if only I had her near me. I've lost her—by the Lord, I've lost her!"

"*Pro tem.,*" said the captain. "A plate of red beef and a glass of port wine alters the view. Too much in the breast, too little in the belly, capsizes lovers. Old story. Horses that ought to be having a mash between their ribs make riders despond. Say, shall we back to the town behind us, or on? Back's the safest, if the chase is up."

Morsfield declared himself incapable of turning and meeting that chariot. He sighed heavily. Cumnock offered to cheer him with a song of Captain Chanter's famous collection, if he liked; but Morsfield gesticulated abhorrence, and set out at a trot. Song in defeat was a hiss of derision to him.

He had failed. Having failed, he for the first time perceived the wildness of a plot that had previously appeared to him as one of the Yorkshire Morsfields' moves to win an object. Traditionally they stopped at nothing. There would have been a sunburst of notoriety in the capture and carrying off of the beautiful Countess of Ormont.

She had eluded him during the downward journey to Steignton. He came on her track at the village at the junction of the roads above Ashead, and thence, confiding in the half-connivance or utter stupidity of the fair one's duenna, despatched a mounted man-servant to his coachman and footmen, stationed ten miles behind, with orders that they should drive forthwith to the great plain, and be ready at a point there for two succeeding days. That was the plot, promptly devised upon receipt of Mrs. Pagnell's communication; for the wealthy man of pleasure was a strategist fit to be a soldier, in dexterity not far from rivalling the man by whom he had been outdone.

An ascetic on the road to success, he dedicated himself to a term of hard drinking under a reverse; and the question addressed to the chief towns in the sketch counties his head contained was, which one near would be likely to supply the port wine for

floating him through garlanding dreams of possession most tastily to blest oblivion.

He was a lover, nevertheless, honest in his fashion, and meant not worse than to pull his lady through a mire, and wash her with Morsfield soap, and crown her, and worship. She was in his blood, about him, above him; he had plunged into her image, as into deeps that broke away in phosphorescent waves on all sides, reflecting every remembered, every imagined, aspect of the adored beautiful woman piercing him to extinction with that last look of her at the moment of flight.

Had he been just a trifle more sincere in the respect he professed for his lady's duenna, he would have turned on the road to Dornton and a better fortune. Mrs. Pagnell had now become the ridiculous Paggy of Mrs. Lawrence Finchley and her circle for the hypocritical gentleman; and he remarked to Captain Cumnock, when their mutual trot was established: "Paggy enough for me for a month—good Lord! I can't stand another dose of her by herself."

"It's a bird that won't roast or boil or stew," said the captain.

They were observed trotting along below by Lord Ormont's groom of the stables on promotion, as he surveyed the country from the chalk-hill rise and

brought the phaeton to a stand, Jonathan Boon, a sharp lad, whose comprehension was a little muddled by "the rights of it" in this adventure. He knew, however, that he did well to follow the directions of one who was in his lordship's pay, and stretched out the fee with the air of a shake of the hand, and had a look of the winning side, moreover. A born countryman could see that.

Boon watched the pair of horsemen trotting to confusion, and clicked in his cheek. The provincial of the period when coaches were beginning to be threatened by talk of new-fangled rails was proud to boast of his outwitting Londoners on material points; and Boon had numerous tales of how it had been done, to have the laugh of fellows thinking themselves such razors. They compensated him for the slavish abasement of his whole neighbourhood under the hectoring of the grand new manufacture of wit in London:—the inimitable Metropolitan PUN, which came down to the country by four-in-hand, and stopped all other conversation wherever it was reported, and would have the roar—there was no resisting it. Indeed, to be able to see the thing smartly was an entry into community with the elect of the district; and when the roaring ceased and the thing was examined, astonishment at the cleverness

of it, and the wonderful shallowness of the seeming deep hole, and the unexhausted bang it had to go off like a patent cracker, fetched it out for telling over again; and up went the roar, and up it went at home and in stable-yards, and at the next puffing of churchwardens on a summer's bench, or in a cricket-booth after a feast, or round the old inn's taproom fire. The pun, the wonderful bo-peep of double meanings darting out to surprise and smack one another from behind words of the same sound, sometimes the same spelling, overwhelmed the provincial mind with awe of London's occult and prolific genius.

Yet down yonder you may behold a pair of London gentlemen trotting along on as fine a fool's errand as ever was undertaken by nincompoops bearing a sealed letter, marked urgent, to a castle, and the request in it that the steward would immediately upon perusal down with their you-know-what and hoist them and birch them a jolly two dozen without parley.

Boon smacked his leg, and then drove ahead merrily.

For this had happened to his knowledge: the gentleman accompanying the lady had refused to make anything of a halt at the Red Lion, and had said he was sure there would be a small public-

house at the outskirts of the town, for there always was one; and he proved right, and the lady and he had descended at the sign of the Jolly Cricketers, and Boon had driven on for half an hour by order.

This, too, had happened, external to Boon's knowledge: the lady and the gentleman had witnessed, through the small diamond window-panes of the Jolly Cricketers' parlour, the passing-by of the two horsemen in pursuit of them; and the gentleman had stopped the chariot coming on some fifteen minutes later, but he did not do it at the instigation of the lady.

CHAPTER VI.

AT THE SIGN OF THE JOLLY CRICKETERS.

THE passing-by of the pair of horsemen, who so little suspected the treasure existing behind the small inn's narrow window, did homage in Aminta's mind to her protector's adroitness. Their eyes met without a smile, though they perceived the grisly comic of the incident. Their thoughts were on the chariot to follow.

Aminta had barely uttered a syllable since the start of the flight from Ashead. She had rocked in a swing between sensation and imagination, exultant, rich with the broad valley of the plain and the high green waves of the downs at their giant's bound in the flow of curves and sunny creases to the final fling-off of the dip on sky. Here was a twisted hawthorn carved clean to the way of the wind; a sheltered clump of chestnuts holding their blossoms up, as with a thousand cresset-clasping hands; here were grasses that nodded swept from green to grey; flowers yellow, white, and blue, significant of a mar-

vellous unknown through the gates of colour; and gorse-covers giving out the bird, squares of young wheat, a single fallow threaded by a hare, and cottage gardens, shadowy garths, wayside flint-heap, woods of the mounds and the dells, fluttering leaves, clouds: all were swallowed, all were the one unworded significance. Scenery flew, shifted, returned; again the line of the downs raced and the hollows reposed simultaneously. They were the same in change to an eye grown older; they promised, as at the first, happiness for recklessness. The whole woman was urged to delirious recklessness in happiness, and she drank the flying scenery as an indication, a likeness, an encouragement.

When her wild music of the blood had fallen to stillness with the stopped wheels, she was in the musky, small, low room of the diamond window-panes, at her companion's disposal for what he might deem the best: he was her fate. But the more she leaned on a man of self-control, the more she admired; and an admiration that may not speak itself to the object present drops inward, stirs the founts; and if these are repressed, the tenderness which is not allowed to weep will drown self-pity, hardening the woman to summon scruples in relation to her unworthiness. He might choose to forget,

but the more she admired, the less could her feminine conscience permit of an utter or of any forgetfulness that she was not the girl Browny, whom he once loved—perhaps loved now, under some illusion of his old passion for her—does love now, ill-omened as he is in that! She read him by her startled reading of her own heart, and she constrained her will to keep from doing, saying, looking aught that would burden without gracing his fortunes. For, as she felt, a look, a word, a touch would do the mischief; she had no resistance behind her cold face, only the physical scruple, which would become the moral unworthiness if in any way she induced him to break his guard and blow hers to shreds. An honourable conscience before the world has not the same certificate in love's pure realm. They are different kingdoms. A girl may be of both; a married woman, peering outside the narrow circle of her wedding-ring, should let her eyelids fall and the unseen fire consume her.

Their common thought was now, Will the chariot follow?

What will he do if it comes? was an unformed question with Aminta.

He had formed and not answered it, holding himself, sincerely at the moment, bound to her

wishes. Near the end of Ashead main street she had turned to him in her seat beside the driver, and conveyed silently, with the dental play of her tongue and pouted lips, "No title."

Upon that sign, waxen to those lips, he had said to the driver, "You took your orders from Lady Charlotte?"

And the reply, "Her ladyship directed me, sir," exonerated Lord Ormont so far.

Weyburn remembered then a passage of one of her steady looks, wherein an oracle was mute. He tried several of the diviner's shots to interpret it: she was beyond his reach. She was in her blissful delirium of the flight, and reproached him with giving her the little bit less to resent—she who had no sense of resentment, except the claim on it to excuse.

Their landlady entered the room to lay the cloth for tea and eggs. She made offer of bacon as well, home-cured. She was a Hampshire woman, and understood the rearing of pigs. Her husband had been a cricketer, and played for his county. He didn't often beat Hampshire! They had a good garden of vegetables, and grass-land enough for two cows. They made their own bread, their own butter, but did not brew.

Weyburn pronounced for a plate of her home-cured. She had children, the woman told him—two boys and a girl. Her husband wished for a girl. Her eldest boy wished to be a sailor, and would walk miles to a pond to sail bits of wood on it, though there had never been a sea-faring man in her husband's family or her own. She agreed with the lady and gentleman that it might be unwise to go contrary to the boy's bent. Going to school or coming home, a trickle of water would stop him.

Aminta said to her companion in French, "Have you money?"

She chased his blood.

"Some: sufficient, I think."

It stamped their partnership.

"I have but a small amount. Aunt was our pay-master. We will buy the little boy a boat to sail. You are pale."

"I've no notion of it."

"Something happened at Ashead."

"It would not have damaged my complexion."

He counted his money. Aminta covertly handed him her purse. Their fingers touched. The very minor circumstance of their landlady being in the room dammed a flood.

Her money and his amounted to seventeen pounds.

The sum-total was a symbol of days that were a fiery wheel.

Honour and blest adventure might travel together two days or three, he thought. If the chariot did not pass:—Lord Ormont had willed it. A man could not be said to swerve in his duty when acting to fulfil the master's orders; and Mrs. Pagnell was proved a hoodwinked duenna, and Morsfield was in the air. The breathing Aminta had now a common purse with her first lover. For three days or more they were, it would seem, to journey together, alone together: the prosecution of his duty imposed it on him. Sooth to say, Weyburn knew that a spice of passion added to a bowl of reason makes a sophist's mess; but he fancied an absolute reliance on Aminta's dignity, and his respect for her was another barrier. He begged the landlady's acceptance of two shillings for her boy's purchase of a boat, advising her to have him taught early to swim. Both he and Aminta had a feeling that they could be helpful in some little things on the road if the chariot did not pass.

Justification began to speak loudly against the stopping of the chariot if it did pass. The fact that sweet wishes come second, and not so loudly, as-

sured him they were quite secondary; for the lover sunk to sophist may be self-beguiled by the arts which render him the potent beguiler.

"We are safe here," he said, and thrilled her with the "we" behind the curtaining leaded window-panes.

"What is it you propose?" Her voice was lower than she intended. To that she ascribed his vivid flush. It kindled the deeper of her dark hue.

He mentioned her want of luggage, and the purchase of a kit.

She said, "Have we the means?"

"We can adjust the means to the ends."

"We must be sparing of expenses."

"Will you walk part of the way?"

"I should like it."

"We shall be longer on the journey."

"We shall not find it tiresome, I hope."

"We can say so, if we do."

"We are not strangers."

The recurrence of the "we" had an effect of wedding: it was fatalistic, it would come; but, in truth, there was pleasure in it, and the pleasure was close to consciousness of some guilt when vowing itself innocent.

And, no, they were not strangers; hardly a word

could they utter without cutting memory to the quick; their present breath was out of the far past.

Love told them both that they were trembling into one another's arms, not voluntarily, against the will with each of them; they knew it would be for life; and Aminta's shamed reserves were matched to make an obstacle by his consideration for her good name and her station, for his own claims to honest citizenship also.

Weyburn acted on his instinct at sight of the postillion and the chariot; he flung the window wide and shouted. Then he said, "It is decided," and he felt the rightness of the decision, like a man who has given a condemned limb to the surgeon.

Aminta was passive as a water-weed in the sway of the tide. Hearing it to be decided, she was relieved. What her secret heart desired, she kept secret, almost a secret from herself. He was not to leave her; so she had her permitted wish, she had her companion *plus* her exclamatory aunt, who was a protection, and she had learnt her need of the smallest protection.

"I can scarcely believe I see you, my dear, dear child!" Mrs. Pagnell cried, upon entering the small inn parlour; and so genuine was her satisfaction that for a time she paid no heed to the stuffiness of the

room, the meanness of the place, the unfitness of such a hostelry to entertain ladies—the Countess of Ormont!

"Eat here?" Mrs. Pagnell asked, observing the preparations for the meal. Her pride quailed, her stomach abjured appetite. But she forbore from asking how it was that the Countess of Ormont had come to the place.

At a symptom of her intention to indulge in disgust, Aminta brought up Mr. Morsfield by name; whereupon Mrs. Pagnell showed she had reflected on her conduct in relation to the gentleman, and with the fear of the earl if she were questioned.

Home-made bread and butter, fresh eggs and sparkling fat of bacon invited her to satisfy her hunger. Aminta let her sniff at the teapot unpunished; the tea had a rustic aroma of ground-ivy, reminding Weyburn of his mother's curiosity to know the object of an old man's plucking of hedgeside leaves in the environs of Bruges one day, and the simple reply to her French, "Tea for the English." A hint of an anecdote interested and enriched the stores of Mrs. Pagnell, so she capped it and partook of the infusion ruefully.

"But the bread is really good," she said, "and

we are unlikely to be seen leaving the place by any person of importance."

"Unless Mr. Morsfield should be advised to return this way," said Aminta.

Her aunt proposed for a second cup. She was a manageable woman; the same scourge had its instant wholesome effect on her when she snubbed the secretary. So she complimented his trencherman's knife, of which the remarkably fine edge was proof enough that he had come heart-whole out of the trial of an hour or so's intimate companionship with a beautiful woman, who had never been loved, never could be loved by man, as poor Mr. Morsfield loved her! He had sworn to having fasted three whole days and nights after his first sight of Aminta. Once, he said, her eyes pierced him so that he dreamed of a dagger in his bosom, and woke himself plucking at it. That was love, as a born gentleman connected with a baronetcy and richer than many lords took the dreadful passion. A secretary would have no conception of such devoted extravagance. At the most he might have attempted to insinuate a few absurd, sheepish, soft nothings, and the Countess of Ormont would know right well how to shrivel him with one of her looks. No lady of the land could convey so much either way, to attract or to repel, as

Aminta, Countess of Ormont! And the man, the only man, insensible to her charm or her scorn, was her own wedded lord and husband. Old, to be sure, and haughty, his pride might not allow him to overlook poor Mr. Morsfield's unintentional offence. But the presence of the countess's aunt was a reply to any charge he might seek to establish. Unhappily, the case is one between men on their touchiest point, when women are pushed aside, and justice and religion as well. We might be living in a heathen land, for aught that morality has to say.

Mrs. Pagnell fussed about being seen on her emergence from the Jolly Cricketers. Aminta sent Weyburn to spy for the possible reappearance of Mr. Morsfield. He reported a horseman; a butcher-boy clattered by. Aminta took the landlady's hand, under her aunt's astonished gaze, and said: "I shall not forget your house and your attention to us." She spoke with a shake of her voice. The landlady curtseyed and smiled, curtseyed and almost whimpered. The house was a poor one, she begged to say; they didn't often have such guests, but whoever came to it they did their best to give good food and drink.

Hearing from Weyburn that the chariot was bound to go through Winchester, she spoke of a

brother, a baker there, the last surviving member of her family; and, after some talk, Weyburn offered to deliver a message of health and greeting at the baker's shop. There was a waving of hands, much nodding and curtseying, as the postillion resumed his demi-volts—all to the stupefaction of Mrs. Pagnell; but she dared not speak, she had Morsfield on the mouth. Nor could she deny the excellent quality of the bread and butter, and milk, too, at the sign of the Jolly Cricketers. She admitted, moreover, that the food and service of the little inn belonged in their unpretentious honesty to the kind we call old English: the dear old simple country English of the brotherly interchange in sight of heaven—good stuff for good money, a matter with a blessing on it.

"But," said she, "my dear Aminta, I do not and I cannot understand looks of grateful affection at a small innkeeper's wife paid, and I don't doubt handsomely paid, for her entertainment of you."

"I feel it," said Aminta; tears rushed to her eyelids, overflowing, and her features were steady.

"Ah, poor dear! that I do understand," her aunt observed. "Any little kindness moves you to-day; and well it may!"

"Yes, aunty," said Aminta, and in relation to

the cause of her tears she was the less candid of the two.

So far did she carry her thanks for a kindness as to glance back through her dropping tears at the sign-board of the Jolly Cricketers; where two brave batsmen cross for the second of a certain three runs, if only the fellow wheeling legs, face up after the ball in the clouds, does but miss his catch: a grand suspensory moment of the game, admirably chosen by the artist to arrest the wayfarer and promote speculation. For will he let her slip through his fingers when she comes down? or will he have her fast and tight? And in the former case, the bats are tearing their legs off for just number nought. And in the latter, there's a wicket down, and what you may call a widower walking it bat on shoulder, parted from his mate for that mortal innings, and likely to get more chaff than consolation when he joins the booth.

CHAPTER VII.

UNDER-CURRENTS IN THE MINDS OF LADY CHARLOTTE AND LORD ORMONT.

ANOTHER journey of travellers to London, in the rear of the chariot, was not diversified by a single incident or refreshed by scraps of dialogue. Lady Charlotte had her brother Rowsley with her, and he might be taciturn,—she drove her flocks of thoughts, she was busily and contentedly occupied. Although separation from him stirred her mind more excitedly over their days and deeds of boy and girl, her having him near, and having now won him to herself, struck her as that old time's harvest, about as much as can be hoped for us from life, when we have tasted it.

The scene of the invasion of Steignton by the woman and her aunt, and that man Morsfield, was a steel engraving among her many rapid and featureless cogitations. She magnified the rakishness of the woman's hand on hip in view of the house, and she magnified the woman's insolence in bringing that

man Morsfield—to share probably the hospitality of Steignton during the master's absence! Her trick of caricature, whenever she dealt with adversaries, was active upon the three persons under observation of the windows. It was potent to convince her that her brother Rowsley had cast the woman to her native obscurity. However, Lady Charlotte could be just: the woman's figure, and as far as could be seen of her face, accounted for Rowsley's entanglement.

Why chastise that man Morsfield at all? Calling him out would give a further dip to the name of Ormont. A pretty idea, to be punishing a man for what you thank him for! He did a service; and if he's as mad about her as he boasts, he can take her and marry her now: Rowsley's free of her.

Morsfield says he wants to marry her—wants nothing better. Then let him. Rowsley has shown him there's no legal impediment. Pity that young Weyburn had to be sent to do watch-dog duty. But Rowsley would not have turned her back to travel alone: that is, without a man to guard. He's too chivalrous.

The sending of Weyburn, she now fancied, was her own doing, and Lady Charlotte attributed it to her interpretation of her brother's heart of chivalry; though it would have been the wiser course, tending

straight and swift to the natural end, if the two women and their Morsfield had received the dismissal to travel as they came.

One sees it after the event. Yes, only Rowsley would not have dismissed her without surety that she would be protected. So it was the right thing prompted on the impulse of the moment. And young Weyburn would meet some difficulty in protecting his "Lady Ormont," if she had no inclination for it.

Analysing her impulse of the moment, Lady Charlotte credited herself, not unjustly, with a certain considerateness for the woman, notwithstanding the woman's violent intrusion between brother and sister. Knowing the world, and knowing the upper or Beanstalk world intimately, she winked at nature's passions. But when the legitimate affection of a brother and sister finds them interposing, they are, as little parsonically as possible, reproved. If persistently intrusive, they are handed to the constable.

How, supposing the case of a wife? Well, then comes the contest; and it is with an inferior, because not a born, legitimacy of union; which may be, which here and there is, affection; is generally the habit of partnership. It is inferior, from not being the union of the blood; it is a matter merely of the laws and the tastes. No love, she reasoned,

is equal to the love of brother and sister: not even the love of parents for offspring, or of children for mother and father. Brother and sister have the holy young days in common; they have lastingly the recollection of their youth, the golden time when they were themselves, or the best of themselves. A wife is a stranger from the beginning; she is necessarily three parts a stranger up to the finish of the history. She thinks she can absorb the husband. Not if her husband has a sister living! She may cry and tear for what she calls her own: she will act prudently in bowing her head to the stronger tie. Is there a wife in Europe who broods on her husband's merits and his injuries as the sister of Thomas Rowsley, Earl of Ormont, does? or one to defend his good name, one to work for his fortunes, as devotedly?

Over and over Lady Charlotte drove her flocks, of much the same pattern, like billows before a piping gale. They might be similar—a puffed iteration, and might be meaningless and wearisome; the gale was a power in earnest.

Her brother sat locked-up. She did as a wife would not have done, and held her peace. He spoke; she replied in as few words—blunt, to the point, as no wife would have done.

Her dear, warm-hearted Rowsley was shaken by

the blow he had been obliged to deal to the woman —poor woman!—if she felt it. He was always the principal sufferer where the feelings were concerned. He was never for hurting any but the enemy.

His "Ha, here we dine!" an exclamation of a man of imprisoned yawns at the apparition of the turnkey, was delightful to her, for a proof of health and sanity and enjoyment of the journey.

"Yes, and I've one bottle left, in the hamper, of the hock you like," she said. "That Mr. Weyburn likes it too. He drank a couple coming down."

She did not press for talk; his ready appetite was the flower of conversation to her. And he slept well, he said. Her personal experience on that head was reserved.

London enfolded them in the late evening of a day brewing storm. My lord heard at the door of his house that Lady Ormont had not arrived. Yet she had started a day in advance of him. He looked down, up and round at Charlotte. He looked into an empty hall.

Pagnell was not there. A sight of Pagnell would, strange to say, have been agreeable.

Storm was in the air, and Aminta was on the road. Lightning has, before now, frightened carriage-horses. She would not misconduct herself; she

would sit firm. No woman in England had stouter nerve—few men. But the carriage might be smashed. He was ignorant of the road she had chosen for her return. Out of Wiltshire there would be no cliffs, quarries, river-banks, presenting dangers. Those dangers, however, spring up when horses have the frenzy.

Charlotte was nodded at, for a signal to depart; and she drove off, speculating on the bullet of a grey eye, which was her brother's adieu to her.

The earl had apparently a curiosity to inspect vacant rooms. His Aminta's drawing-room, her boudoir, her bed-chamber, were submissive in showing bed, knick-knacks, furniture. They told the tale of a corpse.

He washed and dressed, and went out to his club to dine; hating the faces of the servants of the house, just able to bear with the attentions of his valet.

Thunder was rattling at ten at night. The house was again the tomb.

She had high courage, that girl. She might be in a bed, with her window-blind up, calmly waiting for the flashes: lightning excited her. He had seen her lying at her length quietly, her black hair scattered on the pillow, like shadow of twigs and sprays

on moonlit grass, illuminated intermittently; smiling to him, but her heart out and abroad, wild as any witch's. If on the road, she would not quail. But it was necessary to be certain of her having a trusty postillion.

He walked through the drench and scream of a burst cloud to the posting-office. There, after some trouble, he obtained information directing him to the neighbouring mews. He had thence to find his way to the neighbouring pot-house.

The report of the postillion was, on the whole, favourable. The man understood horses—was middle-aged—no sot; he was also a man with an eye for weather, proverbially in the stables a cautious hand—slow. "Old Slow-and-sure," he was called; by name, Joshua Abnett.

"Oh, Joshua Abnett?" said the earl, and imprinted it on his memory, for the service it was to do during the night.

Slow-and-sure Joshua Abnett would conduct her safely, barring accidents. For accidents we must all be prepared. She was a heroine in an accident. The earl recalled one and more: her calm face, brightened eyes, easy laughter. Hysterics were not in her family.

She did wrong to let that fellow Morsfield ac-

company her. Possibly he had come across her on the road, and she could not shake him off. Judging by all he knew of her, the earl believed she would not have brought the fellow into the grounds of Steignton of her free will. She had always a particular regard for decency.

According to the rumour, Morsfield and the woman Pagnell were very thick together. He barked over London of his being a bitten dog. He was near to the mad dog's fate, as soon as a convenient apology for stopping his career could be invented.

The thinking of the lesson to Morsfield on the one hand, and of the slow-and-sure postillion Joshua Abnett on the other, lulled Lord Ormont to a short repose in his desolate house. Of Weyburn he had a glancing thought, that the young man would be a good dog to guard the countess from a mad dog, as he had reckoned in commissioning him.

Next day was the day of sunlight Aminta loved.

It happens with the men who can strike, supposing them of the order of civilised creatures, that when they have struck heavily, however deserved the blow, a liking for the victim will assail them, if they discover no support in hatred; and no sooner is the spot of softness touched than they are invaded by hosts of the stricken person's qualities,

which plead to be taken as virtues, and are persuasive. The executioner did rightly. But it is the turn for the victim to declare the blow excessive.

Now, a just man, who has overdone the stroke, will indemnify and console in every way, short of humiliating himself.

He had an unusually clear vision of the scene at Steignton. Surprise and wrath obscured it at the moment, for reflection to bring it out in sharp outline; and he was able now to read and translate into inoffensive English the inherited Spanish of it, which violated nothing of Aminta's native *donayre,* though it might look on English soil outlandish or stagey.

Aminta stood in sunlight on the greensward. She stood hand on hip, gazing at the house she had so long desired to see, without a notion that she committed an offence. Implicitly upon all occasions she took her husband's word for anything he stated, and she did not consequently imagine him to be at Steignton. So, then, she had no thought of running down from London to hunt and confound him, as at first it appeared. The presence of that white-faced Morsfield vindicated her sufficiently so far. And let that fellow hang till the time for cutting him down! Not she, but Pagnell,

seems to have been the responsible party. And, by the way, one might prick the affair with Morsfield by telling him publicly that his visit to inspect Steignton was waste of pains, for he would not be accepted as a tenant in the kennels, *et cætera*.

Well, poor girl, she satisfied her curiosity, not aware that a few weeks farther on would have done it to the full.

As to Morsfield, never once, either in Vienna or in Paris, had she, warmly admired though she was, all eyes telescoping and sun-glassing on her, given her husband an hour or half an hour or two minutes of anxiety. Letters came. The place getting hot, she proposed to leave it.

She had been rather hardly tried. There are flowers we cannot keep growing in pots. Her fault was, that instead of flinging down her glove and fighting it out openly, she listened to Pagnell, and began the game of Pull. If he had a zest for the game, it was to stump the woman Pagnell. So the veteran fancied in his amended mind.

This intrusive sunlight chased him from the breakfast-table and out of the house. She would be enjoying it somewhere; but the house empty of a person it was used to contain had an atmosphere

of the vaults, and inside it the sunlight she loved had an effect of taunting him singularly.

He called on his upholsterer and heard news to please her. The house hired for a month above Great Marlow was ready; her ladyship could enter it to-morrow. It pleased my lord to think that she might do so, and not bother him any more about the presentation at Court during the current year. In spite of certain overtures from the military authorities, and roused eulogistic citations of his name in the newspapers and magazines, he was not on friendly terms with his country yet, having contracted the fatal habit of irony, which, whether hitting or missing its object, stirs old venom in our wound, twitches the feelings. Unfortunately for him, they had not adequate expression unless he raged within; so he had to shake up wrath over his grievances, that he might be satisfactorily delivered; and he was judged irreconcilable when he had subsided into the quietest contempt, from the prospective seat of a country estate, in the society of a young wife who adored him.

An exile from the sepulchre of that house void of the consecration of ashes, he walked the streets and became reconciled to street sunlight. There were no carriage accidents to disturb him with

apprehensions. Besides, the slowness of the postillion Joshua Abnett, which probably helped to the delay, was warrant of his sureness. And in an accident the stringy fellow, young Weybnrn, could be trusted for giving his attention to the ladies—especially to the younger of the two, taking him for the man his elders were at his age. As for Pagnell, a Providence watches over the Pagnells! Mortals have no business to interfere.

An accident on water would be a frolic to his girl. Swimming was a gift she had from nature. Pagnell vowed she swam out a mile at Dover when she was twelve. He had seen her in blue water: he had seen her readiness to jump to the rescue once when a market-woman, stepping out of a boat to his yacht on the Tagus, plumped in. She had the two kinds of courage—the impulsive and the reasoned. What is life to man or woman if we are not to live it honourably? Men worthy of the name say this. The woman who says and acts on it is—well, she is fit company for them. But only the woman of natural courage can say it and act on it.

Would she come by Winchester, or choose the lower road by Salisbury and Southampton, to smell the sea? perhaps—like her!—dismissing the chariot and hiring a yacht for a voyage round the coast

and up the Thames. She had an extraordinary love of the sea, yet she preferred soldiers to sailors. A woman? Never one of them more a woman! But it came of her quickness to take the colour and share the tastes of the man to whom she gave herself.

My lord was beginning to distinguish qualities in a character.

He was informed at the mews that Joshua Abnett was on the road still. Joshua seemed to be a roadster of uncommon unprogressiveness, proper to a framed picture.

While debating whether to lunch at his loathed club or at a home loathed more, but open to bright enlivenment any instant, Lord Ormont beheld a hat lifted and Captain May saluting him. They were near a famous gambling-house in St. James's Street.

"Good! I am glad to see you," he said. "Tell me: you know Mr. Morsfield pretty well. I'm speaking of my affair. He has been trespassing down on my grounds at Steignton, and I think of taking the prosecution of him into my own hands. Is he in town?"

"I've just left his lame devil Cumnock, my lord," said May, after a slight grimace. "They generally run in tandem."

"Will you let me know?"

"At once, when I hear."

"You will call on me? Before noon?"

"Any service required."

"My respects to your wife."

"Your lordship is very good."

Captain May bloomed at a civility paid to his wife. He was a smallish, springy, firm-faced man, devotee of the lady bearing his name and wielding him. In the days when duelling flourished on our land, frail women could be powerful.

The earl turned from him to greet Lord Adderwood and a superior officer of his Profession, on whom he dropped a frigid nod. He held that all but the rank and file, and a few subalterns, of the service had abandoned him to do homage to the authorities. The Club he frequented was not his military Club. Indeed, lunching at any Club in solitariness that day, with Aminta away from home, was bitter penance. He was rejoiced by Lord Adderwood's invitation, and hung to him after the lunch; for a horrible prospect of a bachelor dinner intimated astonishingly that he must have become unawares a domesticated man.

The solitary later meal of a bachelor was consumed, if the word will suit a rabbit's form of feed-

ing. He fatigued his body by walking the streets and the bridge of the Houses of Parliament, and he had some sleep under a roof where a life like death, or death apeing life, would have seemed to him the Joshua Abnett, if he had been one to take up images.

Next day he was under the obligation to wait at home till noon. Shortly before noon a noise of wheels drew him to the window. A young lady, in whom he recognised Aminta's little school friend, of some name, stepped out of a fly. He met her in the hall.

She had expected to be welcomed by Aminta, and she was very timid on finding herself alone with the earl. He, however, treated her as the harbinger bird, wryneck of the nightingale, sure that Aminta would keep her appointment unless an accident delayed. He had forgotten her name, but not her favourite pursuit of botany; and upon that he discoursed, and he was interested, not quite independently of the sentiment of her being there as a guarantee of Aminta's return. Still he knew his English earth, and the counties and soil for particular wild-flowers, grasses, mosses; and he could instruct her and inspire a receptive pupil on the theme of birds, beasts, fishes, insects, in England and other lands.

He remained discoursing without much weariness till four of the afternoon. Then he had his reward. The chariot was at the door, and the mounted figure of Joshua Abnett, on which he cast not a look or a thought.

Aminta was alone. She embraced Selina Collett warmly, and said, in friendly tones, "Ah! my lord, you are in advance of me."

She had dropped Mrs. Pagnell and Mr. Weyburn at two suburban houses; working upon her aunt's dread of the earl's interrogations as regarded Mr. Morsfield. She had, she said, chosen to take the journey easily on her return, and enjoyed it greatly.

My lord studied her manner more than her speech. He would have interpreted a man's accurately enough. He read hers to signify that she had really enjoyed her journey, "made the best of it," and did not intend to be humble about her visit to Steignton without his permission; but that, if hurt at the time, she had recovered her spirits, and was ready for a shot or two—to be nothing like a pitched battle. And she might fire away to her heart's content: wordy retorts would not come from him; he had material surprises in reserve for her. His question concerning Morsfield knew its answer, and would only be put under pressure.

Comparison of the friends Aminta and Selina was forced by their standing together, and the representation in little Selina of the inferiority of the world of women to his Aminta; he thought of several, and splendid women, foreign and English. The comparison rose sharply now, with Aminta's novel, airy, homely, unchallenging assumption of an equal footing beside her lord, in looks and in tones that had cast off constraint of the adoring handmaid, to show the full-blown woman, rightful queen of her half of the dominion. Between the Aminta of then and now, the difference was marked as between Northern and Southern women: the frozen-mouthed Northerner and the pearl and rose-lipped Southerner; those who smirk in dropping congealed monosyllables, and those who radiantly laugh out the voluble chatter.

Conceiving this to the full in a mind destitute of imagery, but indicative of the thing as clearly as the planed, unpolished woodwork of a cabinet in a carpenter's shop, Lord Ormont liked her the better for the change, though she was not the woman whose absence from his house had caused him to go mooning half a night through the streets, and though it forewarned him of a tougher bit of battle, if battle there was to be.

He was a close reader of surfaces. But in truth,

the change so notable came of the circumstance, that some little way down below the surface he perused, where heart weds mind, or nature joins intellect, for the two to beget a resolution, the battle of the man and the woman had been fought, and the man beaten.

CHAPTER VIII.

EATS OF THE FIRST DAY OF THE CONTENTION OF BROTHER AND SISTER.

N the contest raging at mid-sea still between the and the woman, it is the one who is hard to ttractions of the other that will make choice of pot and have the advantages. A short time r Lord Ormont could have marked it out at his e. He would have been unable to comprehend it was denied him to do so now; for he was r of himself, untroubled by conscience, un-, since he was assured of his Aminta's perfect and his restored sense of possession, that any of softness in him had reversed the condition ir alliance. He felt benevolently the much he to bestow, and was about to bestow. Mean-, without complicity on his part, without his ledge, yet absolutely involving his fate, the had gone against him in Aminta's breast.

ike many of his class and kind, he was

thoroughly acquainted with the physical woman, and he took that first and very engrossing volume of the great Book of Mulier for all the history. A powerful wing of imagination, strong as the flappers of the great Roc of Arabian story, is needed to lift the known physical woman even a very little way up into azure heavens. It is far easier to take a snapshot at the psychic, and tumble her down from her fictitious heights to earth. The mixing of the two makes nonsense of her. She was created to attract the man, for an excellent purpose in the main. We behold her at work incessantly. One is a fish to her hook; another a moth to her light. By the various arts at her disposal she will have us, unless early in life we tear away the creature's coloured gauzes and penetrate to her absurdly simple mechanism. That done, we may, if we please, dominate her. High priests of every religion have successively denounced her as the chief enemy. To subdue and bid her minister to our satisfaction is therefore a right employment of man's unperverted superior strength. Of course, we keep to ourselves the woman we prefer; but we have to beware of an uxorious preference, or we are likely to resemble the Irishman with his wolf, and dance imprisoned in the hug of our captive.

For it is the creature's characteristic to be lastngly awake, in her moments of utmost slavishness nost keenly awake, to the chances of the snaring of he stronger. Be on guard, then. Lord Ormont ıad been on guard then and always: his instinct of commandership kept him on guard. He was on guard now when his Aminta played, not the indignant and the frozen, but the genially indifferent. She did it well, he admitted. Had it been the indignant she played, he might have stooped to cajole the handsome queen of gypsies she was, without acknowledgment of her right to complain. Feeling that he was about to be generous, he shrugged. He meant to speak in deeds.

Lady Charlotte's house was at the distance of a stroller's half-hour across Hyde Park westward from his own. Thither he walked, a few minutes after noon, prepared for cattishness. He could fancy that he had hitherto postponed the visit rather on her account, considering that he would have to crush her if she humped and spat, and he hoped to be allowed to do it gently. There would certainly be a scene.

Lady Charlotte was at home.

"Always at home to you, Rowsley, at any hour.

Mr. Eglett has driven down to the City. There's doctor in a square there's got a reputation for tre ing weak children, and he has taken down y grand-nephew Bobby to be inspected. Poor comes of a poor stock on the father's side. Eglett would have that marriage. Now he s wealth isn't everything. Those Benlews are n lights. However, Elizabeth stood with her fathe have Robert Benlew, and this poor child's the re: I wonder whether they have consciences?"

My lord prolonged the sibilation of his "Y in the way of absent-minded men. He liked l Bobby, but had to class the boy second for present.

"You have our family jewels in your keep Charlotte?"

"No, I haven't,—and you know I haven't, Re ley."

She sprang to arms, the perfect porcupine, at opening words, as he had anticipated.

"Where are the jewels?"

"They're in the cellars of my bankers, and there, you may rely on it."

"I want them."

"I want to have them safe; and there they stop."

"You must get them and hand them over."

"To whom?"

"To me."

"What for?"

"They will be worn by the Countess of Ormont."

"Who's she?"

"The lady who bears the title."

"The only Countess of Ormont I know of is your mother and mine, Rowsley; and she's dead."

"The Countess of Ormont I speak of is alive."

Lady Charlotte squared to him. "Who gives her the title."

"She bears it by right."

"Do you mean to say, Rowsley, you have gone and married the woman since we came up from Steignton?"

"She is my wife."

"Anyhow, she won't have our family jewels."

"If you had swallowed them, you'd have to disgorge."

"I don't give up our family jewels to such people."

"Do you decline to call on her?"

"I do: I respect our name and blood."

"You will send the order to your bankers for them to deliver the jewels over to me at my house this day."

"Look here, Rowsley; you're gone cracked or senile. You're in the hands of one of those clever wenches who catch men of your age. She may catch you; she sha'n't lay hold of our family jewels: they stand for the honour of our name and blood."

"They are to be at my house-door at four o'clock this afternoon."

"They'll not stir."

"Then I go down to your bankers and give them the order."

"My bankers won't attend to it without the order from me."

"You will submit to the summons of my lawyers."

"You're bent on a public scandal, are you?"

"I am bent on having the jewels."

"They are not yours; you've no claim to them; they are heirlooms in our family. Things most sacred to us are attached to them. They belong to our history. There's the tiara worn by the first Countess of Ormont. There's the big emerald of the necklace-pendant—you know the story of it.

Two rubies not counted second to any in England. All those diamonds! I wore the cross and the two pins the day I was presented after my marriage."

"The present Lady Ormont will wear them the day she is presented."

"She won't wear them at Court."

"She will."

"Don't expect the Lady Ormont of tradesmen and footmen to pass the Lord Chamberlain."

"That matter will be arranged for next season. Now I've done."

"So have I; and you have my answer, Rowsley."

They quitted their chairs.

"You decline to call on my wife?" said the earl.

Lady Charlotte replied: "Understand me, now. If the woman has won you round to legitimise the connection, first, I've a proper claim to see her marriage lines. I must have a certificate of her birth. I must have a testified account of her life before you met her and got the worst of it. Then, as the case may be, I'll call on her."

"You will behave yourself when you call."

"But she won't have our family jewels."

"That affair has been settled by me."

"I should be expecting to hear of them as decorating the person of one of that man Morsfield's mistresses."

The earl's brow thickened. "Charlotte, I smacked your cheek when you were a girl."

"I know you did. You might again, and I wouldn't cry out. She travels with that Morsfield; you've seen it. He goes boasting of her. Gypsy or not, she's got queer ways."

"I advise you, you had better learn at once to speak of her respectfully."

"I shall have enough to go through, if what you say's true, with questions of the woman's antecedents and her people, and the date of the day of this marriage. When was the day you did it? I shall have to give an answer. You know cousins of ours, and the way they'll be pressing and comparing ages and bawling rumours. None of them imagined my brother such a fool as to be wheedled into marrying her. You say it's done, Rowsley. Was it done yesterday or the day before?"

Lord Ormont found unexpectedly that she struck on a weak point. Married from the first? Why not

tell me of it? He could hear her voice as if she had spoken the words. And how communicate the pell-mell of reasons?

"You're running vixen. The demand I make is for the jewels," he said.

"You won't have them, Rowsley—not for her."

"You think of compelling me to use force?"

"Try it."

"You swear the jewels are with your bankers?"

"I left them in charge of my bankers, and they've not been moved by me."

"Well, it must be force."

"Nothing short of it when the honour of our family's concerned."

It was rather worse than the anticipated struggle with this Charlotte, though he had kept his temper. The error was in supposing that an hour's sharp conflict would settle it, as he saw. The jewels required a siege.

"When does Eglett return?" he asked.

"Back to lunch. You stay and lunch here, Rowsley: we don't often have you."

The earl contemplated her, measuring her powers of resistance for a prolonged engagement. Odd that the pride which had withdrawn him from the service of an offending country should pitch him into a series

of tussles with women, for its own confusion! He saw that, too, in his dim reflectiveness, and held the country answerable for it.

Mr. Eglett was taken into confidence by him privately after lunch. Mr. Eglett's position between the brother and sister was perplexing; habitually he thought his wife had strong good sense, in spite of the costliness of certain actions at law not invariably confirming his opinion; he thought also that the earl's demand must needs be considered obediently. At the same time, his wife's objection to the new Countess of Ormont, unmasked upon the world, seemed very legitimate; though it might be asked why the earl should not marry, marrying the lady who pleased him. But if, in the words of his wife, the lady had no claim to be called a lady, the marriage was deplorable. On the other hand, Lord Ormont spoke of her in terms of esteem, and he was no fondling dotard.

How to compromise the matter for the sake of peace? The man perpetually plunged into strife by his combative spouse, cried the familiar question again; and at every suggestion of his on behalf of concord he heard from Lady Charlotte that he had no principles, or else from Lord Ormont that his head must be off his shoulders. The man for peace

had the smallest supply of language, and so, unless he took a side and fought, his active part was football between them.

It went on through the afternoon up to five o'clock. No impression was betrayed by Lady Charlotte.

She congratulated her brother on the recruit he had enlisted. He smiled his grimmest of the lips drawn in. A combat, perceptibly of some extension, would soon give him command of the man of peace; and energy to continue attacks will break down the energies of any dogged defensive stand.

He deferred the discussion with his unreasonable sister until the next day at half-past twelve o'clock.

Lady Charlotte nodded to the appointment. She would have congratulated herself without irony on the result of the first day's altercation but for her brother Rowsley's unusual and ominous display of patience.

Twice during the wrangle she had to conceal a difficult breathing. She felt a numbness in one arm now it was over, and mentally complimented her London physician on the unerringness of his diagnosis.

Her heart, however, complained of the cruelty of having in the end, perhaps, if the wrangle should be protracted, to yield, for sheer weakness, without ceasing to beat.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ORMONT JEWELS.

At half-past twelve of the noon next day Lord Ormont was at Lady Charlotte's house door. She welcomed him affectionately, as if nothing were in dispute; he nodded an acceptance of her greetings, with a blunt intimation of the business to be settled; she put on her hump of the feline defensive; then his batteries opened fire and hers barked back on him. Each won admiration of the other's tenacity, all the more determined to sap or split it. They had known one another's character, but they had never seen it in such strong light. Never had their mutual and similar, though opposed, resources been drawn out so copiously and unreservedly. This was the shining scrawl of all that each could do to gain a fight. They admired one another's contemptibly justifiable evasions, changes of front, statements bordering the lie, even to meanness in the withdrawal of admissions and the denial of the same ever having

been made. That was Charlotte! That was Rowsley! Anything to beat down the adversary.

As to will, the woman's will, of these two, equalled the man's. They were matched in obstinacy and unscrupulousness.

Her ingenuities of the defence eluded his attacks, and compelled him to fall on heavy iteration of his demand for the jewels, an immediate restitution of the jewels.

"Why immediate?" cried she.

He repeated it without replying to her.

"But, you tell me, Rowsley, why immediate? If you're in want of money for her, you come to me, tell me, you shall have thousands. I'll drive down to the City to-morrow and sell out stock. Mr. Eglett won't mind when he hears the purpose. I shall call five thousand cheap, and don't ask to see the money again."

"Ah! double the sum to have your own way!" said he.

She protested that she valued her money. She furnished instances of her carefulness of her money all along up to the present period of brutal old age. Yet she would willingly part with five thousand or more to save the family honour. Mr. Eglett would

not only approve, he would probably advance a good part of the money himself.

"Money! Who wants money?" thundered the earl, and jumped out of her trap of the further diversion from the plain request. "To-morrow, when I am here, I shall expect to have the jewels delivered to me."

"That you may hand them over to her. Where are they likely to be this time next year? And what do you know about jewels? You may look at them when you ask to see them, and not know imitation paste—like the stuff Lady Beltus showed her old husband. Our mother wore them, and she prized them. I'm not sure I wouldn't rather hear they were exhibited in a Bond Street jeweller's shop or a Piccadilly pawnbroker's than have them on that woman."

"You speak of my wife."

"For a season, perhaps; and off they're likely to go, to pay bills, if her Adderwoods and her Morsfields are out of funds, as they call it."

"You are aware you are speaking of my wife, Charlotte?"

"You daren't say my sister-in-law."

He did not choose to say it; and once more she dared him. She could imagine she scored a point.

They were summoned to lunch by Mr. Eglett; and there was an hour's armistice; following which the earl demanded the restitution of the jewels, and heard the singular question, childishly accentuated, "What for?"

Patience was his weapon and support, so he named his object with an air of inveteracy in tranquillity: they were for his wife to wear.

Lady Charlotte dared him to say they were for her sister-in-law.

He despised the transparent artifice of the challenge.

"But you have to own the difference," she said. "You haven't lost respect for your family, thank God! No. It's one thing to say she's a wife: you hang fire when it's to say she's my sister-in-law."

"You'll have to admit the fact, Charlotte."

"How long is it since I should have had to admit the fact?"

"From the date of my marriage."

"Tell me the date."

"No, you don't wear a wig, Charlotte; but you are fit to practise in the Law-courts!" he said, exasperatedly jocular.

She had started a fresh diversion, and she pressed

ıim for the date. "I'm supposed to have had a ister-in-law—how many weeks?—months?"

"Years."

"Married years! And if you've been married ears, where were you married? Not in a church. That woman's no church-bride."

"There are some clever women made idiots of ɔy their trullish tempers."

"Abuse away. I've asked you where you were narried, Rowsley."

"Go to Madrid. Go to the Embassy. Apply to he chaplain."

"Married in Madrid! Who's ever married in Madrid! You flung her a yellow handkerchief, and ;he tied it round her neck—that's your ceremony! Now you tell me you've been married years; and ;he's a young woman; you fetch her over from Madrid, set her in a place where those Morsfields and ɔther fungi-fellows grow, and she has to think her-;elf lucky to be received by a Lady Staines and a Mrs. Lawrence Finchley, and she the talk of the :own, refused at Court, for all an honourable-enough ɔld woman countenanced her in pity; and I'm asked :o believe she was my brother's wife, a sister-in-law ɔf mine, all the while! I won't."

Lady Charlotte dilated on it for a length of time, merely to show she declined to believe it; pouring Morsfield over him and the talk of the town, the gypsy caught in Spain—now to be foisted on her as her sister-in-law! She could fancy she produced an effect.

She did indeed unveil to him a portion of the sufferings his Aminta had undergone; as visibly, too, the good argumentative reasons for his previous avoidance of the deadly, dismal wrangle here forced on him. A truly dismal, profitless wrangle! But the finish of it would be the beginning of some solace to his Aminta.

The finish of it must be to-morrow. He refrained from saying so, and simply appointed to-morrow for the resumption of the wrestle, departing in his invincible coat of patience: which one has to wear when dealing with a woman like Charlotte, he informed Mr. Eglett, on his way out at a later hour than on the foregone day. Mr. Eglett was of his opinion, that an introduction of lawyers into a family dispute was "rats in the pantry"; and he would have joined him in his gloomy laugh, if the thought of Charlotte in a contention had not been so serious a matter. She might be beaten; she could not be brought to yield.

She retired to her bedroom, and laid herself flat on her bed, immovable, till her maid undressed her for the night. A cup of broth and strip of toast formed her sole nourishment. As for her doctor's possible reproaches, the symptoms might crowd and do their worst; she fought for the honour of her family.

At midday of the third day Lady Charlotte was reduced to the condition of those fortresses which wave defiantly the flag, but deliver no further shot, awaiting the assault. Her body, affected by hideous old age, succumbed. Her will was unshaken. She would not write to her bankers. Mr. Eglett might go to them, if he thought fit. Rowsley was to understand that he might call himself married; she would have no flower-basket bunch of a sister-in-law thrust upon her.

Lord Ormont and Mr. Eglett walked down to her bankers in the afternoon. As a consequence of express injunctions given by my lady five years previously, the assistant-manager sought an interview with her.

The jewels were lodged at her house the day ensuing. They were examined, verified by the list in Lady Charlotte's family record-book, and then taken away—forcibly of course—by her brother.

He laughed in his dry manner; but the reminiscent glimpses, helping him to see the humour of it, stirred sensations of the tug it had been with that combative Charlotte, and excused him for having shrunk from the encounter until he conceived it to be necessary.

Settlement of the affair with Morsfield now claimed his attention. The ironical tolerance he practised in relation to Morsfield when Aminta had no definite station before the world changed to an angry irritability at the man's behaviour now that she had stepped forth under his acknowledgment of her as the Countess of Ormont. He had come round to a rather healthier mind regarding his country, and his introduction of the Countess of Ormont to the world was his peace-offering.

As he returned home earlier on the third day, he found his diligent secretary at work. The calling on Captain May and the writing to the sort of man were acts obnoxious to his dignity; so he despatched Weyburn to the captain's house, one in a small street of three narrow tenements abutting on aristocracy and terminating in mews. Weyburn's mission was to give the earl's address at Great Marlow for the succeeding days, and to see Captain May, if the captain was at home. During his absence the pre-

cious family jewel-box was locked in safety. Aminta and her friend, little Miss Collett, were out driving, by the secretary's report. The earl considered it a wholesome feature of Aminta's character that she should have held to her modest schoolmate: the fact spoke well for both of them.

A look at the papers to serve for Memoirs was discomposing, and led him to think the secretary could be parted with as soon as he pleased to go: say, a week hence.

The Memoirs were no longer designed for issue. He had the impulse to treat them on the spot as the Plan for the Defence of the Country had been treated; and for absolutely obverse reasons. The secretary and the Memoirs were associated: one had sprung out of the other. Moreover, the secretary had witnessed a scene at Steignton. The young man had done his duty, and would be thanked for that, and dismissed, with a touch of his employer's hand. The young man would have made a good soldier—a better soldier, good as he might be as a scribe. He ought to have been in his father's footsteps, and he would then have disciplined or quashed his fantastical ideas. Perhaps he was right on the point of toning the Memoirs here and there. Since the scene at Steignton Lord Ormont's views had

changed markedly in relation to everybody about him, and most things.

Weyburn came back at the end of an hour to say that he had left the address with Mrs. May, whom he had seen.

"A handsome person," the earl observed.

"She must have been very handsome," said Weyburn.

"Ah! we fall into their fictions, or life would be a bald business, upon my word!"

Lord Ormont had not uttered it before the sentiment of his greater luck with one of that queer world of the female lottery went through him on a swell of satisfaction, just a wave.

An old-world eye upon women, it seemed to Weyburn. But the man who could crown a long term of cruel injustice with the harshness to his wife at Steignton would naturally behold women with that eye.

However, he was allowed only to generalise; he could not trust himself to dwell on Lady Ormont and the Aminta inside the shell. Aminta and Lady Ormont might think as one or diversely of the executioner's blow she had undergone. She was a married woman, and she probably regarded the

wedding by law as the end a woman has to aim at, and is annihilated by hitting; one flash of success, and then extinction, like a boy's cracker on the pavement. Not an elevated image, but closely resembling that which her alliance with Lord Ormont had been!

At the same time, no true lover of a woman advises her—imploring is horrible treason—to slip the symbolic circle of the law from her finger, and have in an instant the world for her enemy. She must consent to be annihilated, and must have no feelings; particularly no mind. The mind is the danger for her. If she has a mind alive she will certainly push for the position to exercise it, and run the risk of a classing with Nature's created mates for reptile men.

Besides, Lady Ormont appeared, in the company of her friend Selina Collett, not worse than rather too thoughtful; not distinctly unhappy. And she was conversable, smiling. She might have had an explanation with my lord, accepting excuses—or, who knows? taking the blame, and offering them. Weakness is pliable. So pliable is it, that it has been known for a crack of the masterly whip to fling off the victim and put on the culprit! Ay, but let it be as it may with Lady Ormont, Aminta is of

a different composition. Aminta's eyes of the return journey to London were haunting lights, and lured him to speculate; and for her sake he rejected the thought that for him they meant anything warmer than the passing thankfulness, though they were a novel assurance to him of her possession beneath her smothering cloud of the power to resolve, and show forth a brilliant individuality.

The departure of the ladies and my lord in the travelling carriage for the house on the Upper Thames was passably sweetened to Weyburn by the command to him to follow in a day or two, and continue his work there until he left England. Aminta would not hear of an abandonment of the Memoirs. She spoke on the subject to my lord as to a husband pardoned.

She was not less affable and pleasant with him out of Weyburn's hearing. My lord earned her gratitude for his behaviour to Selina Collett, to whom he talked interestedly of her favourite pursuit, as he had done on the day when, as he was not the man to forget, her arrival relieved him of anxiety. Aminta noticed the box on the seat beside him.

They drove up to their country house in time to dress leisurely for dinner. Nevertheless, the dinner-hour had struck several minutes before she de-

cended; and the earl, as if not expecting her, was ut on the garden path beside the river bank with elina. She beckoned from the step of the open rench window.

He came to her at little Selina's shuffling pace, onversing upon water-plants.

"No jewelry to-day?" he said.

And Aminta replied: "Carstairs has shown me he box and given the key. I have not opened it."

"Time in the evening, or to-morrow. You guess he contents?"

"I presume I do."

She looked feverish and shadowed.

He murmured kindly: "Anything?"

"Not now: we will dine."

She had missed, had lost, she feared, her own ewel-box; a casket of no great treasure to others, ut of a largely estimable importance to her.

After the heavy ceremonial entrance and exit of lishes, she begged the earl to accompany her for an xamination of the contents of the box.

As soon as her chamber-door was shut, she said, n accents of alarm: "Mine has disappeared. Car- tairs, I know, is to be trusted. She remembers arrying the box out of my room; she believes she an remember putting it into the fly. She had to

confess that it had vanished, without her knowing how, when my boxes were unpacked."

"Is she very much upset?" said the earl.

"Carstairs? Why, yes, poor creature! you can imagine. I have no doubt she feels for me; and her own reputation is concerned. What do you think is best to be done?"

"To be done! Overhaul the baggage again in all the rooms."

"We've not failed to do that."

"Control yourself, my dear. If, by bad luck, they're lost, we can replace them. The contents of this box, now, we could not replace. Open it, and judge."

"I have no curiosity—forgive me, I beg. And the servant's fly has been visited, ransacked inside and out, footmen questioned; we have not left anything we can conceive of undone. My lord, will you suggest?"

"The intrinsic value of the gems would not be worth—not worth Aminta's one beat of the heart. Upon my word—not one!"

An amatory knightly compliment breasting her perturbation roused an unwonted spite; and a swift reflection on it startled her with a suspicion. She

cast it behind her. He could be angler and fish, he would not be cat and mouse.

She said, however, more temperately: "It is not the value of the gems. We are losing precious minutes!"

"Association of them with the giver? Is it that? If that has a value for you, he is flattered."

This betrayed him to the woman waxing as intensely susceptible in all her being as powder to sparks.

"There is to be no misunderstanding, my lord," she said. "I like—I value my jewels; but—I am alarmed lest the box should fall into hands——into strange hands."

"The box!" he exclaimed, with an outline of a comic grimace; and, if proved a voluptuary in torturing, he could instance half a dozen points for extenuation: her charm of person, withheld from him, and to be embraced; her innocent naughtiness; compensation coming to her in excess for a transient infliction of pain. "Your anxiety is about the box?"

"Yes, the box," Aminta said firmly. "It contains——"

"No false jewels? A thief might complain."

"It contains letters, my lord."

"Blackmail?"

"You would be at liberty to read them. I would rather they were burnt."

"Ah!" The earl heaved his chest prodigiously. "Blackmail letters are better in a husband's hands, if they can be laid there."

"If there is a necessity for him to read them—yes."

"There may be a necessity, there can't be a gratification,—though there are dogs of thick blood that like to scratch their sores," he murmured to himself. "You used to show me these declaration epistles."

"Not the names."

"Not the names—no!"

"When we had left the country, I showed you why it had been my wish to go."

"Xarifa was and is female honour. Take the key, open that box; I will make inquiries. But, my dear, you guess everything. Your little box was removed for the bigger impression to be produced by this one."

A flash came out of her dark eyes.

"No, you guess wrong this time, you clever shrew! I wormed nothing from you," said he. "I knew you kept particular letters in that receptacle of

things of price: Aminta can't conceal. The man has worried you. Why not have come to me?"

"Oblige me, my lord, by restoring me my box."

"This is your box."

Her bosom lifted with the words Oh, no! unspoken.

He took the key and opened the box. A dazzling tray of stones was revealed; underneath it the constellations in cases, very heavens for the worldly Eve; and he doubted that Eve could have gone completely out of her. But she had, as observation instructed him, set her woman's mind on something else, and must have it before letting her eyes fall on objects impossible for any of her sex to see without coveting them.

He bowed. "I will fetch it," he said magnanimously.

Her own box was brought from his room. She then consented to look womanly at the Ormont jewels, over which the battle, whereof she knew nothing, and nothing could be told her, had been fought in her interests, for her sovereign pleasure.

She looked and admired. They were beautiful jewels: the great emerald was wonderful, and there were two rubies to praise. She excused herself for declining to put the circlet for the pendant round

her neck, or a glittering ring on her finger. Her remarks were encomiums, not quite so cold as those of a provincial spinster of an ascetic turn at an exhibition of the world's flycatcher gewgaws. He had divided Aminta from the Countess of Ormont, and it was the wary Aminta who set a guard on looks and tones before the spectacle of his noble bounty, lest any, the smallest, payment of the dues of the countess should be demanded. Rightly interpreting him to be by nature incapable of asking pardon, or acknowledging a wrong done by him, however much he might crave exemption from blame and seek for peace, she kept to her mask of injury, though she hated unforgivingness; and she felt it little, she did it easily, because her heart was dead to the man.

My lord's hand touched her on her shoulder, propitiatingly in some degree, in his dumb way.

Offended women can be emotional to a towering pride, that bends while it assumes unbendingness: it must come to their sensations, as it were a sign of humanity in the majestic, speechless king of beasts; and they are pathetically melted, abjectly hypocritical; a nice confusion of sentiments, traceable to a tender bosom's appreciation of strength and the perceptive compassion for its mortality.

In a case of the alienated wife, whose blood is

ıing another way, no foul snake's bite is more onous than that indicatory touch, however simple slight. My lord's hand, lightly laid on Aminta's ılder, became sensible of soft warm flesh stiffening ıe skeleton.

CHAPTER X.

LOVERS MATED.

He was benevolently marital, to the extent of paternal, in thinking his girl, of whom he deigned to think now as his countess, pardonably foolish. Woman for woman, she was of a pattern superior to the world's ordinary, and might run the world's elect a race. But she was pitifully woman-like in her increase of dissatisfaction with the more she got. Women are happier enslaved. Men, too, if their despot is an Ormont. Colonel of his regiment, he proved that: his men would follow him anywhere, do anything. Grand old days, before he was condemned by one knows not what extraordinary round of circumstances to cogitate on women as fluids, and how to cut channels for them, that they may course along in the direction good for them, imagining it their pretty wanton will to go that way! Napoleon's treatment of women is excellent example. Peterborough's can be defended.

His Aminta could not reason. She nursed a

rancour on account of the blow she drew on herself at Steignton, and she declined consolation in her being pardoned. The reconcilement evidently was proposed in one of the detestable feminine storms enveloping men weak enough to let themselves be dragged through a scene for the sake of domestic tranquillity.

A remarkable exhibition of Aminta the woman was, her entire change of front since she had taken her spousal chill. Formerly she was passive, merely stately, the chiselled *grande dame,* deferential in her bearing and speech, even when argumentative and having an opinion to plant. She had always the independent eye and step; she now had the tongue of the graceful and native great lady, fitted to rule her circle and hold her place beside the proudest of the Ormonts. She bore well the small shuffle with her jewel-box—held herself gallantly. There had been no female feignings either, affected misapprehensions, gapy ignorances, and snaky subterfuges, and the like, familiar to men who have the gentle twister in grip. Straight on the line of the thing to be seen she flew, and struck on it; and that is a woman's martial action. He would right heartily have called her comrade, if he had been active himself. A warrior pulled off his horse, to sit in a

chair and contemplate the tenuous and minute evolutions of the sex is pettish with his part in such battle-fields at the stage beyond amusement.

Seen swimming, she charmed him. Abstract views of a woman summon opposite advocates: one can never say positively, That is she! But the visible fair form of a woman is hereditary queen of us. We have none of your pleadings and counter-pleadings and judicial summaries to obstruct a ravenous loyalty. My lord beheld Aminta take her three quick steps on the plank, and spring and dive and ascend, shaking the ends of her bound black locks; and away she went with shut mouth and broad stroke of her arms into the sunny early morning river; brave to see, although he had to flick a bee of a question, why he enjoyed the privilege of seeing, and was not beside her. The only answer confessed to a distaste for an exercise once pleasurable.

She and her little friend boated or strolled through the meadows during the day; he fished. When he and Aminta rode out for the hour before dinner, she seemed pleased. She was amicable, conversable, all that was agreeable as a woman, and she was the chillest of wives. My lord's observations and reflections came to one conclusion; she

pricked and challenged him to lead up to her desired stormy scene. He met her and meant to vanquish her with the dominating patience Charlotte had found too much for her: women cannot stand against it.

To be patient in contention with women, however, one must have a continuous and an exclusive occupation; and the tax it lays on us conduces usually to impatience with men. My lord did not directly connect Aminta's chillness and Morsfield's impudence; yet the sensation roused by his Aminta participated in the desire to punish Morsfield speedily. Without wishing for a duel, he was moved by the social sanction it had to consider whether green youths and women might not think a grey head had delayed it too long. The practice of the duel begot the peculiar animal logic of the nobler savage, which tends to magnify an offence in the ratio of our vanity, and hunger for a blood that is not demanded by the appetite. Moreover, a waning practice, in disfavour with the new generation, will be commended to the conservative barbarian, as partaking of the wisdom of his fathers. Further, too, we may have grown slothful, fallen to moodiness, done excess of service to Omphale, our tyrant lady of the glow and the chill; and then undoubtedly the duel braces.

He left Aminta for London, submissive to the terms of intimacy dictated by her demeanour, his unacknowledged seniority rendering their harshness less hard to endure. She had not gratified him with a display of her person in the glitter of the Ormont jewels; and since he was, under common conditions, a speechless man, his ineptitude for amorous remonstrances precipitated him upon deeds, that he might offer additional proofs of his esteem and the assurance of her established position as his countess. He proposed to engage Lady Charlotte in a conflict severer than the foregoing, until he brought her to pay the ceremonial visit to her sister-in-law. The count of time for this final trial of his masterfulness he calculated at a week. It would be an occupation, miserable occupation though it was. He hailed the prospect of chastising Morsfield, for a proof that his tussels with women, prolonged study of their tricks, manœuvrings and outwittings of them, had not emasculated him.

Aminta willingly promised to write from day to day. Her senses had his absence insured to them by her anticipation of the task. She did not conceive it would be so ponderous a task. What to write to him when nothing occurred! Nothing did occur, unless the arrival of Mr. Weyburn was to be

named an event. She alluded to it: "Mr. Weyburn has come, expecting to find you here. The dispatch-box is here. Is he to await you?"

That innocent little question was a day gained.

One day of boating on the upper reaches of the pastoral river, and walks in woods and golden meadows, was felicity fallen on earth, the ripe fruit of dreams. A dread surrounded it, as a belt, not shadowing the horizon; and she clasped it to her heart the more passionately, like a mother her rosy infant, which a dark world threatens and the universal fate.

Love, as it will be at her June of life, was teaching her to know the good and bad of herself. Women, educated to embrace principles through their timidity and their pudency, discover, amazed, that these are not lasting qualities under love's influence. The blushes and the fears take flight. The principles depend much on the beloved. Is he a man whose contact with the world has given him understanding of life's laws, and can hold him firm to the right course in the strain and whirling of a torrent, they cling to him, deeply they worship. And if they tempt him, it is not advisedly done. Nature and love are busy in conjunction. The timidities and pudencies have flown; they may hover, they are

not present. You deplore it, you must not blame; you have educated them so. Muscular principles are sown only out in the world; and, on the whole, with all their errors, the worldly men are the truest as well as the bravest of men. Her faith in his guidance was equal to her dependence. The retrospect of a recent journey told her how he had been tried.

She could gaze tenderly, betray her heart, and be certain of safety. Can wine match that for joy? She had no schemes, no hopes, but simply the desire to bestow, the capacity to believe. Any wish to be enfolded by him was shapeless and unlighted, unborn; though now and again for some chance word or undefined thought she surprised the strange tenant of her breast at an incomprehensibly faster beat, and knew it for her own and not her own, the familiar the stranger—an utter stranger, as one who had snared her in a wreath and was pulling her off her feet.

She was not so guileless at the thought of little Selina Collett here, and of Selina as the letter-bearer of old; and the marvel that Matey and Browny and Selina were together after all! Was it not a kind of summons to her to call him Matey just once, only once, in play? She burned and ached to do it.

She might have taxed her ingenuity successfully to induce little Selina to the boldness of calling him Matey; and she then repeating it, as the woman who revived with a meditative effort recollections of the girl. Ah, frightful hypocrite! Thoughts of the pleasure of his name aloud on her lips in his hearing dissolved through her veins, and were met by Matthew Weyburn's open face, before which hypocrisy stood rent and stripped. She preferred the calmer, the truer pleasure of seeing him modestly take lessons in the nomenclature of weeds, herbs, grasses, by hedge and ditch. Selina could instruct him as well in entomology, but he knew better the Swiss, Tyrolese, and Italian valley-homes of beetle and butterfly species. Their simple talk was a cool zephyr fanning Aminta.

The suggestion to unite the two came to her, of course, but their physical disparity denied her that chance to settle her own difficulty, and a whisper of one physically the match for him punished her. In stature, in healthfulness, they were equals, perhaps: not morally or intellectually. And she could claim headship of him on one little point confided to her by his mother, who was bearing him, and startled by the boom of guns under her pillow, when her

husband fronted the enemy: Matthew Weyburn, the fencer, boxer, cricketer, hunter, all things manly, rather shrank from firearms—at least, one saw him put on a screw to manipulate them. In danger—among brigands or mutineers, for example—she could stand by him and prove herself his mate. Intellectually, morally, she had to bow humbly. Nor had she, nor could she do more than lean on and catch example from, his prompt spiritual valiancy. It shone out from him, and a crisis fulfilled the promise. Who could be his mate for cheerful courage, for skill, the ready mind, easy adroitness, and for self-command? To imitate was a woman's utmost.

Matthew Weyburn appeared the very Matey of the first of May cricketing day among Cuper's boys the next morning, when seen pacing down the garden-walk. He wore his white trousers of that happiest of old days—the "white ducks" Aminta and Selina remembered. Selina beamed. "Yes, he did; he always wore them; but now it's a frock-coat instead of a jacket."

"But now he will be a master instead of a schoolboy," said Aminta. "Let us hope he will prosper."

"He gives me the idea of a man who must suc-

ceed," Selina said; and she was patted, rallied, asked how she had the idea, and kissed; Aminta saying she fancied it might be thought, for he looked so confident.

"Only not what the boys used to call 'cocky,'" said Selina. "He won't be contemptuous of those he outstrips."

"His choice of the schoolmaster's profession points to a modesty in him, does it not, little woman?"

"He made me tell him, while you were writing your letters yesterday, all about my brother and his prospects."

"Yes, that is like him. And I must hear of your brother, 'little Collett.' Don't forget, Sely, little Collett was our postman."

The Countess of Ormont's humorous reference to the circumstance passed with Selina for a sign of a poetic love of the past, and a present social elevation that allowed her to review it impassively. She admired the great lady and good friend who could really be interested in the fortunes of a mere schoolmaster and a merchant's clerk. To her astonishment, by some agency beyond her fathoming, she found herself, and hardly for her own pleasure,

pushing the young schoolmaster animatedly to have an account of his aims in the establishment of the foreign school.

Weyburn smiled. He sent a short look at Aminta; and she, conscious of her detected diplomacy, had an inward shiver, mixed of the fascination and repugnance felt by a woman who knows that under one man's eyes her character is naked and anatomised. Her character?—her soul. He held it in hand and probed it mercifully. She had felt the sweet sting again and again, and had shrunk from him, and had crawled to him. The love of him made it all fascination. How did he learn to read at any moment right to the soul of a woman? Did experience teach him, or sentimental sympathy? He was too young, he was too manly. It must be because of his being in heart and mind the brother to the sister with women.

Thames played round them on his pastoral pipes. Bee-note and woodside blackbird and meadow cow, and the leap of the fish of the silver rolling rings, composed the music.

She gave her mind to his voice, following whither it went; half was in air, higher than the swallow's, exalting him.

How is it he is the brother of women? They are sisters for him because he is neither sentimentalist nor devourer. He will not flatter to feed on them. The one he chooses, she will know love. There are women who go through life not knowing love. They are inanimate automatic machines, who lay them down at last, inquiring wherefore they were caused to move. She is not of that sad flock. She will be mated; she will have the right to call him Matey. A certain Browny called him Matey. She lived and died. A certain woman apes Browny's features and inherits her passion, but has forfeited her rights. Were she, under happiest conditions, to put her hand in his, shame would burn her. For he is just—he is Justice; and a woman bringing him less than his due, she must be a creature of the slime!

This was the shadowy sentiment that made the wall of division between them. There was no other. Lord Ormont had struck to fragments that barrier of the conventional oath and ceremonial union. He was unjust—he was Injustice. The weak may be wedded, they cannot be married, to Injustice. And if we have the world for the buttress of injustice, then is Nature the flaring rebel; there is no fixed order possible. Laws are necessary instruments of

the majority; but when they grind the sane human being to dust for their maintenance, their enthronement is the rule of the savage's old deity, sniffing blood-sacrifice. There cannot be a based society upon such conditions. An immolation of the naturally-constituted individual arrests the general expansion to which we step, decivilises more, and is more impious to the God in man, than temporary revelries of a licence that Nature soon checks.

Arrows of thoughts resembling these shot over the half of Aminta's mind not listening. Her lover's head was active on the same theme while he spoke. They converged to it from looks crossing or catching profiles, or from tones, from a motion of hand, from a chance word. Insomuch that the third person present was kept unobservant only by her studious and humble speculations on the young schoolmaster's grand project to bring the nationalities together, and teach Old England to the Continent—the Continent to Old England: our healthy games, our scorn of the lie, manliness; their intellectual valour, diligence, considerate manners.

"Just to name a few of the things for interchange," said Weyburn. "As to method, we shall

be their disciples. But I look forward to our fellows getting the lead. No hurry. Why will they? you ask *in petto*. Well, they're emulous, and they take a thrashing kindly. That's the way to learn a lesson. I've seen our fellows beaten and beaten—never the courage beaten out of them. In the end, they won and kept the field. They have a lot to learn—principally not to be afraid of ideas. They lose heaps of time before they can feel at home with ideas. They call themselves practical for having an addiction to the palpable. It is a pretty wreath they clap on their deficiencies. Practical dogs are for bones, horses for corn. I want the practical Englishman to settle his muzzle in a nosebag of ideas. When he has once got hold of them, he makes good stuff of them. On the Continent ideas have wings and pay visits. Here, they're stay-at-home. Then I want our fellows to have the habit of speaking from the chest. They shall return to England with the whoop of the mountains in them and ready to jump out. They shall have an Achillean roar; and they shall sing by second nature. Don't fear: they'll give double for anything they take. I've known Italians, to whom an Englishman's honesty of mind and dealing was one of the dreams of a better humanity they had put in a box. Frenchmen, too, who, when

they came to know us, were astonished at their epithet of *perfide,* and loved us."

"Emile," said Aminta. "You remember Emile, Selina: the dear little French boy at Mr. Cuper's?"

"Oh, I do," Selina responded.

"He will work with Mr. Weyburn in Switzerland."

"Oh, that will be nice!" the girl exclaimed.

Aminta squeezed Selina's hand. A shower of tears clouded her eyes. She chose to fancy it was because of her envy of the modest, busy, peaceful girl, who envied none. *Ἔρως ἀνίκατε μάχαν,* conquers also sincerity in the sincerest. She was vexed with her full breast, and had as little command of her thoughts as of her feelings.

"Mr. Weyburn has ideas for the education of girls too," she said.

"There's the task," said he. "It's to separate them as little as possible. All the—*passez-moi le mot*—devilry between the sexes begins at their separation. They're foreigners when they meet; and their alliances are not always binding. The chief object in life, if happiness be the aim, and the growing better than we are, is to teach men and women how

to be one; for, if they're not, then each is a morsel for the other to prey on. Lady Charlotte Eglett's view is, that the greater number of them on both sides hate one another."

"Hate!" exclaimed Selina; and Aminta said: "Is Lady Charlotte Eglett an authority?"

"She has observed, and she thinks. She has in the abstract the justest of minds: and that is the curious point about her. But one may say they are trained at present to be hostile. Some of them fall in love and strike a truce, and still they are foreigners. They have not the same standard of honour. They might have it from an education in common."

"But there must be also a lady to govern the girls?" Selina interposed.

"Ah, yes; she is not yet found!"

"Would it increase their mutual respect?—or show of respect, if you like?" said Aminta, with his last remark at work as the shattering bell of a city's insurrection in her breast.

"In time, under management; catching and grouping them young. A boy who sees a girl do what he can't, and would like to do, won't take refuge in his muscular superiority—which, by the way, would be lessened."

"You suppose their capacities are equal?"

"Things are not equal. I suppose their excellencies to make a pretty nearly equal sum in the end. But we're not weighing them each. The question concerns the advantage of both."

"That seems just!"

Aminta threw no voice into the word "just." It was the word of the heavens assuaging earth's thirst, and she was earth to him. Her soul yearned to the man whose mind conceived it.

She said to Selina: "We must plan an expedition next year or the year after, and see how the school progresses."

All three smiled; and Selina touched and held Aminta's hand shyly. Visions of the unseen Switzerland awed her.

Weyburn named the Spring holiday time, the season of the flowering Alpine robes. He promised welcome, pressed for a promise of the visit. Warmly it was given. "We will; we will indeed!"

"I shall look forward," he said.

There was nothing else for him or for her, except to doat on the passing minute that slipped when seized. The looking forward turned them to the

looking back at the point they had flown from, and yielded a momentary pleasure, enough to stamp some section of a picture on their memories, which was not the burning *now* Love lives for, in the clasp, if but of hands. Desire of it destroyed it. They swung to the future, swung to the present it made the past, sensible to the quick of the *now* they could not hold. They were lovers. Divided lovers in presence, they thought and they felt in pieces. Feelings and thoughts were forbidden to speech. She dared look the very little of her heart's fulness, without the disloyalty it would have been in him to let a small peep of his heart be seen. While her hand was not clasped she could look tenderly, and her fettered state, her sense of unworthiness muffled in the deeps, would keep her from the loosening to passion.

He who read through her lustrous, transiently dwelling eyes had not that security. His part, besides the watch over the spring of his hot blood, was to combat a host, insidious among which was unreason calling her Browny, urging him to take his own, to snatch her from a possessor who forfeited by undervaluing her. This was the truth in a better-ordered world: she belonged to the man who could help her to grow and to do her work. But in the world we have around us, it was the distorted truth:

and keeping passion down, he was able to wish her such happiness as pertained to safety from shipwreck, and for himself, that he might continue to walk in the ranks of the sober citizens.

Oh, true and right, but she was gloriously beautiful! Day by day she surpassed the wondrous Browny of old days. All women were eclipsed by her. She was that fire in the night which lights the night and draws the night to look at it. And more: this queen of women was beginning to have a mind at work. One saw already the sprouting of a mind repressed. She had a distinct ability; the good ambition to use her qualities. She needed life and air—that is, comprehension of her, encouragement, the companion mate. With what strength would she now endow him! The pride in the sharp imagination of possessing her whispered a boast of the strength her mate would have from her. His need and her need rushed together somewhere down the skies. They could not, he argued, be separated eternally.

He had to leave her. Selina, shocked at a boldness she could not understand in herself, begged him to stay and tell her of Switzerland and Alpine flowers and herbs, and the valleys for the gold beetle and the Apollo butterfly. Aminta hinted that Lord

Ormont might expect to find him there, if he came the next morning; but she would not try to persuade, and left the decision with him, loving him for the pain he inflicted by going.

Why, indeed, should he stay? Both could ask; they were one in asking. Anguish balanced pleasure in them both. The day of the pleasure was heaven to remember, heaven to hope for; not so heavenly to pray for. The praying for it, each knew, implored their joint will to decree the perilous blessing. A shadowy sentiment of duty and rectitude, born of what they had suffered, hung between them and the prayer for a renewal, that would renew the tempting they were conscious of when the sweet, the strained, throbbing day was over. They could hope for chance to renew it, and then they would be irresponsible. Then they would think and wish discreetly, so as to have it a happiness untainted. In refusing now to take another day or pray for it, they deserved that chance should grant it.

Aminta had said through Selina the utmost her self-defences could allow. But the idea of a final parting cut too cruelly into her life, and she murmured: "I shall see you before you go for good?"

"I will come, here or in London."

"I can trust?"

"Quite certain."

A meeting of a few hasty minutes involved none of the dangers of a sunny, long summer day; and if it did, the heart had its claims, the heart had its powers of resistance. Otherwise we should be base verily.

He turned on a bow to leave her before there was a motion for the offer of her hand.

After many musings and frettings, she reached the wisdom of that. Wisdom was her only nourishment now. A cold, lean dietary it is; but he dispensed it, and it fed her, or kept her alive. It became a proud feeling that she had been his fellow in the achievement of a piece of wisdom; though the other feeling, that his hand's kind formal touching, without pressure of hers, would have warmed her to go through the next interview with her lord, mocked at pure satisfaction. Did he distrust himself? Or was it to spare her? But if so, her heart was quite bare to him! But she knew it was.

Aminta drove her questioning heart as a vessel across blank circles of sea, where there was nothing save the solitary heart for answer. It answered in-

telligibly and comfortingly at last, telling her of proof given that she could repose under his guidance with absolute faith. Was ever loved woman more blest than she in such belief? She had it firmly; and a blessedness, too, in this surety wavering beneath shadows of the uncertainty. Her eyes knew it, her ears were empty of the words. Her heart knew it, and it was unconfirmed by reason. As for his venturing to love her, he feared none. And no sooner did that reflection surge than she stood up beside him in revolt against her lion and lord. Her instinct judged it impossible she could ever have yielded her heart to a man lacking courage. Hence —what? when cowardice appeared as the sole impediment to happiness now!

He had gone, and the day lived again for both of them—a day of sheer gold in the translation from troubled earth to the mind. One another's beauty through the visage into the character was newly perceived and worshipped; and the beauties of pastoral Thames, the temple of peace, hardly noticed in the passing of the day—taken as air to the breather; until some chip of the scene, round which an emotion had curled, was vivid foreground and gateway to shrouded romance: it might be the stream's white

face browning into willow-droopers, or a wagtail a water-lily leaf, or the fore-horse of an up-r barge at strain of legs, a red-finned perch hun foot above the pebbles in sun-veined depths, a k fisher on the scud under alders, the forest of bankside weeds.

CHAPTER IX.

PREPARATIONS FOR A RESOLVE.

THAT day receded like a spent billow, and lapsed among the others advancing, but it left a print deeper than events would have stamped. Aminta's pen declined to run to her lord; and the dipping it in ink was no acceleration of the process. A sentence, bearing likeness to an artless infant's trot of the half-dozen steps to mother's lap, stumbled upon the full stop midway. Desperate determination pushed it along, and there was in consequence a dead stop at the head of the next sentence. A woman whose nature is insurgent against the majesty of the man to whom she must, among the singular injunctions binding her, regularly write, sees no way between hypocrisy and rebellion. For rebellion, she, with the pen in her hand, is avowedly not yet ripe, hypocrisy is abominable.

If she abstained from writing, he might travel down to learn the cause; a similar danger, or worse,

haunted the writing frigidly. She had to be the hypocrite or else—leap.

But an honest woman who is a feeling woman, when she consents to play hypocrite, cannot do it by halves. From writing a short cold letter, Aminta wrote a short warm one, or very friendly. Length she could avoid, because she was unable to fill a page. It seemed that she could not compose a friendly few lines without letting her sex be felt in them. What she had put away from her, so as not to feel it herself, the simulation of ever so small a bit of feeling brought prominently back; and where she had made a cast for flowing independent simplicity, she was feminine, ultra-feminine to her reading of it.

Better take the leap than be guilty of double-dealing even on paper! The nature of the leap she did not examine.

Her keen apprehension of the price payable for his benevolent intentions caught scent of them in the air. Those Ormont jewels shone as emblems of a detested subjection, the penalty for being the beautiful woman raging men proclaimed. Was there no scheme of some other sort, and far less agreeable, to make amends for Steignton? She was shrewd at

divination; she guessed her lord's design. Rather than meet Lady Charlotte, she proposed to herself the "leap" immediately; knowing it must be a leap in the dark, hoping it might be into a swimmer's water. She had her own pin-money income, and she loathed the chain of her title. So the leap would at least be honourable, as it assuredly would be unregretted, whatever ensued.

While Aminta's heart held on to this debate, and in her bed, in her boat, across the golden valley meadows beside her peaceful little friend, she gathered a gradual resolution without sight of agencies or consequences, Lord Ormont was kept from her by the struggle to master his Charlotte a second time—compared with which the first was insignificant. And this time it was curious: he could not subdue her physique, as he did before; she was ready for him each day, and she was animated, much more voluble, she was ready to jest. The reason being, that she fought now on plausibly good grounds: on behalf of her independent action.

Previously, her intelligence of the ultimate defeat hanging over the mere stubborn defence of a weak position had harassed her to death's door. She had no right to retain the family jewels; she had the most perfect of established rights to refuse doing an

ignominious thing. She refused to visit the so-called Countess of Ormont, or leave her card, or take one step to warrant the woman in speaking of her as her sister-in-law. And no,—it did not signify that her brother Rowsley was prohibited by her from marrying whom he pleased. It meant, that to judge of his acts as those of a reasoning man, he would have introduced his wife to his relatives—the relatives he had not quarrelled with—immediately upon his marriage unless he was ashamed of the woman; and a wife he was ashamed of was no sister-in-law for her nor aunt for her daughters. Nor should she come playing the Black Venus among her daughters' husbands, Lady Charlotte had it in her bosom to say additionally.

Lord Ormont was disconcerted by her manifest pleasure in receiving him every day. Evidently she consented to the recurrence of a vexatious dissension for the enjoyment of having him with her hourly. Her dialectic, too, was cunning. Impetuous with meaning, she forced her way to get her meaning out, in a manner effective to strike her blow. Anything for a diversion or a triumph of the moment! He made no way. She was the better fencer at the tongue.

Yet there was not any abatement of her deference

to her brother; and this little misunderstanding put aside, he was the Rowsley esteemed by her as the chief of men. She foiled him, it might seem, to exalt him the more. After he had left the house, visibly annoyed and somewhat stupefied, she talked of him to her husband, of the soul of chivalry Rowsley was, the loss to his country. Mr. Eglett was a witness to one of the altercations, when she, having as usual the dialectical advantage, praised her brother, to his face, for his magnanimous nature; regretting only that it could be said he was weak on the woman side of him—which was, she affirmed, a side proper to every man worth the name; but in his case his country might complain. Of what?—Well, of a woman.—What had she done, for the country to complain of her?—Why, then, arts or graces, she had bewitched and weaned him from his public duty, his military service, his patriotic ambition.

Lord Ormont's interrogations, heightening the effect of Charlotte's charge, appeared to Mr. Eglett as a giving of himself over into her hands; but the earl, after a minute of silence, proved he was a tricky combatant. It was he who had drawn on Charlotte, that he might have his opportunity to eulogise—"this lady, whom you continue to call the

woman, after I have told you she is my wife." According to him, her appeals, her entreaties, that he should not abandon his profession or let his ambition rust, had been at one period constant.

He spoke fervently, for him eloquently; and he gained his point; he silenced Lady Charlotte's tongue, and impressed Mr. Eglett.

When the latter and his wife were alone, he let her see that the Countess of Ormont was becoming a personage in his consideration.

Lady Charlotte cried out: "Hear these men where it's a good-looking woman between the winds! Do you take anything Rowsley says for earnest? You ought to know he stops at no trifle to get his advantage over you in a dispute. That's the soldier in him. It's victory at any cost!—and I like him for it. Do you tell me you think it possible my brother Rowsley would keep smothered years under a bushel the woman he can sit here magnifying— because he wants to lime you and me: you to take his part, and me to go and call the noble creature decked out in his fine fiction my sister-in-law. Nothing 'll tempt me to believe my brother could behave in such a way to the woman he respected!"

So Mr. Eglett opined. But he had been impressed.

He relieved his mind on the subject in a communication to Lord Adderwood; who habitually shook out the contents of his to Mrs. Lawrence Finchley; and she, deeming it good for Aminta to have information of the war waging for her behoof, obtained her country address, with the resolve to drive down, a bearer of good news to the dear woman she liked to think of, look at, and occasionally caress; besides rather tenderly pitying her, now that a change of fortune rendered her former trials conspicuous.

An incident, considered grave even in the days of the duel and the kicks against a swelling public reprehension of the practice, occurred to postpone her drive for four-and-twenty hours. London was shaken by rumours of a tragic mishap to a socially well-known gentleman at the Chiallo fencing-rooms. The rumours passing from mouth to mouth acquired, in the nature of them, sinister colours as they circulated. Lord Ormont sent Aminta word of what he called "a bad sort of accident at Chiallo's," without mentioning names or alluding to suspicions.

He treated it lightly. He could not have written of it with such unconcern if it involved the secretary! Yet Aminta did seriously ask herself whether he could; and she flew rapidly over the field of his

character, seizing points adverse, points favourably advocative, balancing dubiously—most unjustly: she felt she was unjust. But in her condition, the heart of a woman is instantly planted in jungle when the spirits of the two men closest to her are made to stand opposed by a sudden excitement of her fears for the beloved one. She cannot see widely, and is one of the wild while the fit lasts; and, after it, that savage narrow vision she had of the unbeloved retains its vivid print in permanence. Was she unjust? Aminta cited corroboration of her being accurate: such was Lord Ormont! and although his qualities of gallantry, courtesy, integrity, honourable gentleman, presented a fair low-level account on the other side, she had so stamped his massive selfishness and icy inaccessibility to emotion on her conception of him that the repulsive figure formed by it continued towering when her mood was kinder.

Love played on love in the woman's breast. Her love had taken a fever from her lord's communication of the accident at Chiallo's, and she pushed her alarm to imagine the deadliest, and plead for the right of confession to herself of her unrepented regrets. She and Matey Weyburn had parted without any pressure of hands, without a touch. They were, *then*, unplighted if now the grave divided them!

No touch: mere glances! And she sighed not, as she pleaded, for the touch, but for the plighting it would have been. If now she had lost him, she could never tell herself that since the dear old buried and night-walking schooldays she had said once *Matey* to him, named him once to his face Matey Weyburn. A sigh like the roll of a great wave breaking against a wall of rock came from her for the possibly lost chance of naming him to his face Matey,—oh, and seeing his look as she said it!

The boldness might be fancied: it could not be done. Agreeing with the remote inner voice of her reason so far, she toned her exclamatory foolishness to question, in Reason's plain, deep, *basso-profundo* accompaniment tone, how much the most blessed of mortal women could do to be of acceptable service to a young schoolmaster?

There was no reply to the question. But it became a nestling centre for the skiey flock of dreams, and for really temperate soundings of her capacities, tending to the depreciatory. She could do little. She entertained the wish to work, not only "for the sake of Somebody," as her favourite poet sang, but for the sake of working and serving—proving that she was helpfuller than a Countess of Ormont, ranged with all the other countesses in china and

Dresden on a drawing-room mantelpiece for show. She could organise, manage a household, manage people too, she thought: manage a husband? The word offends. Perhaps invigorate him, here and there perhaps inspire him, if he would let her breathe. Husbands exist who refuse the right of breathing to their puppet wives. Above all, as it struck her, she could assist, and be more than an echo of one nobler, in breathing manliness, high spirit, into boys. With that idea she grazed the shallows of reality, and her dreams whirred from the nest and left it hungrily empty.

Selina Collett was writing under the verandah letters to her people in Suffolk, performing the task with marvellous ease. Aminta noted it as a mark of superior ability, and she had the envy of the complex nature observing the simple. It accused her of some guiltiness, uncommitted and indefensible. She had pushed her anxiety about "the accident at Chiallo's" to an extreme that made her the creature of her sensibilities. In the midst of this quiet country life and landscape, these motionless garden flowers headed by the smooth white river, and her gentle little friend so homely here, the contemplation of herself was like a shriek in music. Worse than *discordant*, she pronounced herself inferior, unfit

mentally as well as bodily for the dreams of companionship with any noble soul who might have the dream of turning her into something better. There are couples in the world, not coupled by priestly circumstance, who are close to the true union, by reason of generosity on the one part, grateful devotion, as for the gift of life, on the other. For instance, Mrs. Lawrence Finchley and Lord Adderwood, which was an instance without resemblance; but Aminta's heart beat thick for what it wanted, and they were the instance of two that did not have to snap false bonds of a marriage-tie in order to walk together composedly outside it—in honour? Oh yes, yes! She insisted on believing it was in honour.

She saw the couple issue from the boathouse. She had stepped into the garden full of a presentiment; so she fancied, the moment they were seen. She had, in fact, heard a noise in the boathouse while thinking of them, and the effect on her was to spring an idea of mysterious interventions at the sight.

Mrs. Lawrence rushed to her, and was embraced.

"You're not astonished to see me? Adder drove me down, and stopped his coach at the inn, and

rowed me the half-mile up. We will lunch, if you propose; but presently. My dear, I have to tell you things. You have heard?"

"The accident?"

Aminta tried to read in Mrs. Lawrence's eyes whether it closely concerned her.

Those pretty eyes, their cut of lids hinting at delicate affinities with the rice-paper lady of the court of China, were trying to peer seriously.

"Poor man! One must be sorry for him: he——"

"Who?"

"You've not heard, then?" Mrs. Lawrence dropped her voice: "Morsfield."

Aminta shivered. "All I have heard—half a line from my lord this morning: no name. It was at the fencing-rooms, he said."

"Yes, he wouldn't write more," said Mrs. Lawrence, nodding. "You know, he would have had to do it himself if it had not been done for him. Adder saw him some days back in a brown consultation near his club with Captain May. Oh, but of course it was accident! Did he call it so in his letter to you?"

"One word of Mr. Morsfield: he is wounded?"

"Past cure: he has the thing he cried for, spoilt

boy as he was from his birth. I tell you truth, m' Aminta, I grieve to lose him. What with his airs of the foreign-tinted, punctilious courtly gentleman covering a survival of the ancient British forest boar or bear, he was a picture in our modern set, and piquant. And he was devoted to our sex, we must admit, after the style of the bears. They are for honey, and they have a hug. If he hadn't been so much of a madman, I should have liked him for his courage. He had plenty of that, nothing to steer it. A second cousin comes in for his estates."

"He is dead?" Aminta cried.

"Yes, dear, he is gone. What the women think of it I can't say. The general feeling among the men is that some one of them would have had to send him sooner or later. The curious point, Adder says, is his letting it be done by steel. He was a dead shot, dangerous with the small sword, as your Mr. Weyburn said, only soon off his head. But I used to be anxious about the earl's meeting him with pistols. He did his best to provoke it. Here, Adder,"—she spoke over her shoulder,—"tell Lady Ormont all you know of the Morsfield-May affair."

Lord Adderwood bowed compliance. His coolness was the masculine of Mrs. Lawrence's hardly feminine in treating of a terrible matter, so that the

dull red facts had to be disengaged from his manner of speech before they sank into Aminta's acceptance of them as credible.

"They fought with foils, buttons off, preliminary ceremonies perfect; salute in due order; guard, and at it. Odd thing was, nobody at Chiallo's had a notion of the business till Morsfield was pinked. He wouldn't be denied; went to work like a fellow meaning to be skewered, if he couldn't do the trick: and he tried it. May had been practising some weeks. He's well on the Continent by this time. It'll blow over. Button off sheer accident. I wasn't lucky enough to see the encounter: came in just when Chiallo was lashing his poll over Morsfield flat on the ground. He had it up to the hilt. We put a buttoned foil by the side of Morsfield, and all swore to secrecy. As it is, it'll go badly against poor Chiallo. Taste for fencing won't be much improved by the affair. They quarrelled in the dressing-room, and fetched the foils and knocked off the buttons there. A big rascal toady squire of Morsfield's did it for him. Morsfield was just up from Yorkshire. He said he was expecting a summons elsewhere, bound to await it, declined provocation for the present. May filliped him on the cheek."

"Adder conveyed the information of her husband's flight to the consolable Amy," said Mrs. Lawrence.

"He had to catch the coach for Dover," Adderwood explained. "His wife was at a dinner-party. I saw her at midnight."

"Fair Amy was not so very greatly surprised?"

"Quite the soldier's wife!"

"She said she was used to these little catastrophes. But, Adder, what did she say of her husband?"

"Said she was never anxious about him, for nothing would kill him."

Mrs. Laurence shook a doleful head at Aminta.

"You see, my dear Aminta, here's another, and probably her last, chance of sharing the marquisate gone. Who can fail to pity her, except old Time! And I'm sure she likes her husband well enough. She ought: no woman ever had such a servant. But the captain has not been known to fight without her sanction, and the inference is—— Alas! woe! Fair Amy is doomed to be the fighting captain's bride to the end of the chapter. Adder says she looked handsome. A dinner-party suits her cosmetic complexion better than a ball. The account of the inquest is in the day's papers, and we were

tolerably rejoiced we could drive out of London without having to reply to coroner's questions."

"He died—soon?" Aminta's voice was shaken.

Mrs. Lawrence touched at her breast, it might be for heart or lungs. Judging by Aminta's voice and face, one could suppose she was harking back, in woman's way, to her original sentiment for the man, now that he lay prostrate.

Aminta read the unreproachful irony in the smile addressed to her. She was too convulsed by her many emotions and shouting thoughts to think of defending herself.

Selina, in the drawing-room, diligently fingered and classed brown-black pressed weeds of her neophyte's botany-folios. The sight of her and her occupation struck Aminta as that of a person in another world beyond this world of blood, strangely substantial to view; and one heard her speak!

Guilty?—no. But she had wished to pique her lord. After the term of a length of months, could it be that the unhappy man and she were punished for the half-minute's acting of some interest in him? And Lord Ormont had been seen consulting Captain May; or was it giving him directions?

Her head burned. All the barren interrogations were up, running and knocking for hollow responses;

and, saving a paleness of face, she cloaked any small show of the riot. She was an amiable hostess. She had ceased to comprehend Mrs. Lawrence, even to the degree of thinking her unfeminine. She should have known that the "angelical chimpanzee," as a friend, once told of his being a favourite with the lady, had called her, could not simulate a feeling, and had not the slightest power of pretence to compassion for an ill-fated person who failed to quicken her enthusiasm. In that, too, she was a downright boy. Morsfield was a kind of Bedlamite to her; amusing in his antics, and requiring to be manœuvred and eluded while he lived: once dead, just a tombstone, of interest only to his family.

She beckoned Aminta to follow her; and, with a smirk of indulgent fun, commended Lord Adderwood to a study of Selina Collett's botany-folios, which the urbanest of indifferent gentlemen had slid his eyes over his nose to inspect before the lunch.

"You ought to know what is going on in town, my dear Aminta. You have won the earl to a sense of his duty, and he's at work on the harder task of winning Lady Charlotte Eglett to a sense of hers. It's tremendous. Has been forward some days, and no sign of yielding on either side. Mr. Eglett, good man, is between them, catching it right and left; and

he deserves his luck for marrying her. Vows she makes him the best of wives. If he's content, I've nothing to complain of. You must be ready to receive her; my lord is sure to carry the day. You gulp. You won't be seeing much of her. I'm glad to say he is condescending to terms of peace with the Horse Guards. We hear so. You may be throning it officially somewhere next year. And all's well that ends well! Say that to me!"

"It is, when the end comes," Aminta replied.

Mrs. Lawrence's cool lips were pressed to her cheek.

The couple and their waterman rowed away to the party they had left with the four-in-hand at their inn.

A wind was rising. The trees gave their swish of leaves, the river darkened the patch of wrinkles, the bordering flags amid the reed-blades dipped and streamed.

Surcharged with unassimilated news of events, that made a thunder in her head, Aminta walked down the garden path, meeting Selina and bearing her on. She had a witch's will to rouse gales. Hers was not the woman's nature to be driven cowering by stories of men's bloody deeds. She took the field, revolted, dissevering herself from the class

which tolerated them — actuated by a reflective morality, she believed; and loathed herself for having aspired, schemed, to be a member of the class. But it was not the class, it was against her lord as representative of the class, that she was now the rebel, neither naming him nor imagining him. Her enveloping mind was black on him. Such as one of those hard slaughtering men could call her his own? She breathed short and breathed deep. Her bitter reason had but the common pity for a madman despatched to his rest. Yet she knew hatred of her lord in his being suspected as instigator or accomplice of the hand that dealt the blow. He became to her thought a python whose coils were about her person, insufferable to the gaze backward.

Moments like these are the mothers in travail of a resolve joylessly conceived, undesired to clasp, Necessity's offspring. Thunderclouds have as little love of the lightnings they fling.

Aminta was aware only of her torment. The trees were bending, the water hissing, the grasses all this way and that, like hands of a delirious people in surges of wreck. She scorned the meaningless shake of the garments of earth, and exclaimed: "If we were by the sea to-night!"

"I shall be to-morrow night," said Selina. "I shall think of you. Oh! would you come with me?"

"Would you have me?"

"My mother will indeed be honoured by your consenting to come."

"Write to her before the post is out."

"We shall travel down together?"

Aminta nodded and smiled, and Selina kissed her hand in joy, saying, that down home she would not be so shy of calling her Aminta. She was bidden to haste.

CHAPTER XII.

VISITS OF FAREWELL.

THE noise in London over Aldophus Morsfield's tragical end disturbed Lord Ormont much less than the cessation of letters from his Aminta; and that likewise, considering this present business on her behalf, he patiently shrugged at and pardoned, foreseeing her penitent air. He could do it lightly after going some way to pardon his offending country. For Aminta had not offended; his robust observation of her was moved to the kindly humorous by a reflective view here and there of the downright woman her clever little shuffles exposed her to be, not worse. It was her sex that made her one of the gliders in grasses, some of whom are venomous; but she belonged to the order only as an innocuous blind-worm. He could pronounce her small by-play with Morsfield innocent, her efforts to climb the stairs into Society quite innocent; judging her, of course, by her title of woman. A woman's innocence

has a rainbow skin. Set this one beside other women, she comes out well, fairly well, well enough.

Now that the engagement with Charlotte assumed proportions of a series of battles, properly to be entitled a campaign, he had, in his loneliness, fallen into the habit of reflecting at the close of his day's work; and the rubbing of that unused opaque mirror hanging inside a man of action had helped him piecemeal to perceive bits of his conduct, entirely approved by him, which were intimately connected, nevertheless, with a train of circumstances that he disliked and could not charge justly upon any other shoulders than his own. What was to be thought of it? He would not be undergoing this botheration of the prolonged attempt to bring a stubborn woman to a sense of her duty, if he had declared his marriage in the ordinary style, and given his young countess her legitimate place before the world. What impeded it? The shameful ingratitude of his countrymen to the soldier who did it eminent service at a crisis of the destinies of our Indian Empire! He could not condone the injury done to him by entering among them again. Too like the kicked cur, that! He retired—call it "sulked in his tent," if you like. His wife had to share his fortunes. He being slighted, she necessarily was shadowed. For

a while she bore it contentedly enough; then began her mousy scratches to get into the room off the wainscot, without blame from him; she behaved according to her female nature.

Yes, but the battles with Charlotte forced on his recognition once more, and violently, the singular consequences of his retirement and Coriolanus quarrel with his countrymen. He had doomed himself ever since to a contest with women. First it was his Queen of Amazons, who, if vanquished, was not so easily vanquished; and, in fact, doubtfully,—for now, to propitiate her, he had challenged, and must overcome or be disgraced, the toughest Amazonian warrior man could stand against at cast of dart or lock of arms. No day scored an advantage; and she did not apparently suffer fatigue. He did: that is to say, he was worried and hurried to have the wrangle settled and Charlotte at Aminta's feet. He gained not an inch of ground. His principle in a contention of the sort was to leave the woman to the practice of her obvious artifices, and himself simply hammer, incessantly hammer. But Charlotte hammered as well. The modest position of the defensive negative was not to her taste. The moment he presented himself she flew out upon some yesterday's part of the argument and carried the war

across the borders, in attacks on his character and qualities—his weakness regarding women, his incapacity to forgive, and the rest. She hammered on that head. As for any prospect of a termination of the strife, he could see none in her joyful welcome to him and regretful parting and pleased appointment of the next meeting day after day.

The absurdest of her devices for winding him off his aim was to harp on some new word she had got hold of: as, for example, to point out to him his aptitudes, compliment him on his aptitudes, recommend him to study and learn the limitations of his aptitudes! She revelled in something the word unfolded to her.

However, here was the point: she had to be beaten. So, if she, too, persisted in hammering, he must employ her female weapon of artifice with her. One would gladly avoid the stooping to it in a civil dispute, in which one is not so gloriously absolved for lying and entrapping as in splendid war.

Weyburn's name was announced to him at an early hour on Thursday morning. My lord nodded to the footman; he nodded to himself over a suggestion started in a tactical intelligence by the name.

"Ah! you're off?" he accosted the young man.

"I have come to take my leave, my lord."

"Nothing new in the morning papers?"

"A report that Captain May intends to return and surrender."

"Not before a month has passed, if he follows my counsel."

"To defend his character."

"He has none."

"His reputation."

"He has too much."

"These charges against him must be intolerable."

"Was he not a bit of a pupil of yours?"

"We practised two or three times — nothing more."

"Morsfield was a wasp at a feast. Somebody had to crush him. I've seen the kind of man twice in my life; and exactly the kind of man. If their law puts down duelling, he rules the kingdom!"

"My lord, I should venture to say the kind of man can be a common annoyance because the breach of the law is countenanced."

"Bad laws are best broken. A society that can't get a scouring now and then will be a dirty set."

With a bend of the head, in apology for speaking of himself, Weyburn said: "I have acted on my view. I declined a challenge from a sort of henchman of his."

"Oh! a poacher's lurcher? You did right. Fight such fellows with constables. You have seen Lady Charlotte?"

"I am on my way to her ladyship."

"Do me this favour. Fourteen doors up the street of her residence, my physician lives. I have to consult him at once. Dr. Rewkes."

Weyburn bowed. Lady Charlotte could not receive him later than half-past ten of the morning, he said.

"This morning she can," said my lord. "You will tell Dr. Rewkes that it is immediate. I rather regret your going. I shall be in a controversy with the Horse Guards about our cavalry saddles. It would be regiments of raw backs the first fortnight of a campaign."

The earl discoursed on saddles; and passed to high eulogy of our Hanoverian auxiliar troopers in the Peninsula: "good husbands," he named them quaintly, speaking of their management of their beasts. Thence he diverged to Frederic's cavalry,

rarely matched for shrewdness and endurance; to the deeds of the Lichtenstein Hussars; to the great things Blücher did with his horsemen.

The subject was interesting; but Weyburn saw the clock at past the half after ten. He gave a slight sign of restiveness, and was allowed to go when the earl had finished his *pro* and *con* upon Arab horses and Mameluke saddles. Lord Ormont nicked his head, just as at their first interview: he was known to have an objection to the English shaking of hands. "Good-morning," he said; adding a remark or two, of which *et cætera* may stand for an explicit rendering. It concerned the young man's prosperity: my lord's conservative plain sense was in doubt of the prospering of a giddy pate, however good a worker. His last look at the young man, who had not served him badly, held an anticipation of possibly some day seeing a tatterdemalion of shipwreck, a rueful exhibition of ideas put to the business of life.

Weyburn left the message with Dr. Rewkes in person. It had not seemed to him that Lord Ormont was one requiring the immediate attendance of a physician. By way of accounting to Lady Charlotte for the lateness of his call, he mentioned the summons he had delivered.

"Oh, that's why he hasn't come yet," said she. "We'll sit and talk till he does come. I don't wonder if his bile has been stirred. He can't oil me to credit what he pumps into others. His Lady Ormont! I believe in it less than ever I did. Morsfield or no Morsfield—and now the poor wretch has got himself pinned to the plank, like my grandson Bobby's dragonflies, I don't want to say anything further of him—she doesn't have much of a welcome at Steignton! If I were a woman to wager as men do, I'd stake a thousand pounds to five on her never stepping across the threshold of Steignton. All very well in London, and that place he hires up at Marlow. He respects our home. That's how I know my brother Rowsley still keeps a sane man. A fortune on it!—and so says Mr. Eglett. Any reasonable person must think it. He made a fool of some Hampton-Evey at Madrid, if he went through any ceremony—and that I doubt. But she and old (what do they call her?) may have insisted upon the title, as much as they could. He sixty, she under twenty, I'm told. Pagnell's the name. That aunt of a good-looking young woman sees a nobleman of sixty admiring her five feet seven or so—she's tall—of marketable merchandise, and she doesn't need telling that at sixty he'll give the world to possess

the girl. But not his family honour! He stops at that. Why? Lord Ormont's made of pride! He'll be kind to her, he'll be generous, he won't forsake her; she'll have her portion in his will, and by the course of things in nature, she'll outlive him and marry, and be happy, I hope. Only she won't enter Steignton. You remember what I say. You'll live when I'm gone. It's the thirst of her life to be mistress of Steignton. Not she!—though Lord Ormont would have us all open our doors to her; mine too, now he's about it. He sets his mind on his plan, and he forgets rights and dues—everything; he must have it as his will dictates. That's how he made such a capital soldier. You know the cavalry leader he was. If they'd given him a field in Europe! His enemies admit that. Twelve! and my clock's five minutes or more slow. What can Rowsley be doing?"

She rattled backward on the scene at Steignton, and her brother's handsome preservation of his dignity: "stood it like the king he is!" and to the Morsfield-May encounter, which had prevented another; and Mrs. May was rolled along in the tide, with a hint of her good reason for liking Lord Ormont; also the change of opinion shown by the Press as to Lord Ormont's grand exploit. Referring

to it, she flushed and jigged on her chair for a saddle beneath her. And that glorious Indian adventure warmed her to the man who had celebrated it among his comrades when a boy at school.

"You're to teach Latin and Greek, you said. For you're right: we English can't understand the words we're speaking, if we don't know a good deal of Latin and some Greek. 'Conversing in tokens, not standard coin,' you said, I remember; and there'll be a 'general rabble tongue,' unless we English are drilled in the languages we filched from. Lots of lords and ladies want the drilling, then! I'll send some over to you for Swiss air and roots of the English tongue. Oh, and you told me you supported Lord Ormont on his pet argument for *corps d'élite;* and you quoted Virgil to back it. Let me have that line again—in case of his condescending to write to the papers on the subject."

Weyburn repeated the half-line.

"Good: I won't forget now. And you said the French act on that because they follow human nature, and the English don't. We 'bully it,' you said. That was on our drive down to Steignton. I hope you'll succeed. You'll be visiting England. Call on me in London or at Olmer—only mind and give

me warning. I shall be glad to see you. I've got some ideas from you. If I meet a man who helps me to read the world and men as they are, I'm grateful to him; and most people are not, you'll find. They want you to show them what they'd like the world to be. We don't agree about a lady. You're in the lists, lance in rest, all for chivalry. You're a man, and a young man. Have you taken your leave of her yet? She'll expect it, as a proper compliment."

"I propose running down to take my leave of Lady Ormont to-morrow," replied Weyburn.

"She is handsome?

"She is very handsome."

"Beautiful, do you mean?"

"Oh, my lady, it would only be a man's notion!"

"Now, that's as good an answer as could be made. You're sure to succeed. I'm not the woman's enemy. But let her keep her place. Why, Rowsley can't be coming to-day! Did Lord Ormont look ill?"

"It did not strike me so."

"He's between two fires. A man gets fretted. But I sha'n't move a step. I dare say she won't.

Especially with that Morsfield out of the way. You do mean you think her a beauty. Well, then, there'll soon be a successor to Morsfield. Beauties will have their weapons, and they can hit on plenty; and it's nothing to me, as long as I save my brother from their arts."

Weyburn felt he had done his penance in return for kindness. He bowed and rose, Lady Charlotte stretched out her hand.

"We shall be sending you a pupil some day," she said, and smiled. "Forward your address as soon as you're settled."

Her face gave a glimpse of its youth in a cordial farewell smile.

Lord Ormont had no capacity to do the like, although they were strictly brother and sister in appearance. The smallest difference in character rendered her complex and kept him simple. She had a thirsting mind. Weyburn fancied that a close intimacy of a few months would have enabled him to lift her out of her smirching and depraving mean jealousies. He speculated, as he trod the street, on little plots and surprises, which would bring Lady Charlotte and Lady Ormont into presence, and end by making friends of them. Supposing that could

be done, Lady Ormont might be righted by the intervention of Lady Charlotte after all.

Weyburn sent his dream flying with as dreamy an after-thought: "Funny it will be then for Lady Charlotte to revert to the stuff she has been droning in my ear half an hour ago!—Look well behind, and we see spots where we buzzed, lowed, bit and tore; and not until we have cast that look and seen the brute are we human creatures."

A crumb of reflection such as this could brace him, adding its modest maravedi to his prized store-house of gain, fortifying with assurances of his having a concrete basis for his business in life. His great youthful ambition had descended to it, but had sunk to climb on a firmer footing.

Arthur Abner had his next adieu. They talked of Lady Ormont, as to whose position of rightful Countess of Ormont Mr. Abner had no doubt. He said of Lady Charlotte: "She has a clear head; but she loves her 'brother Rowsley' excessively; and any excess pushes to craziness."

He spoke to Weyburn of his prospects in the usually, perhaps necessarily, cheerless tone of men who recognise by contrast the one mouse's nibbling at a mountain of evil. "To harmonise the nationalities, my dear boy!—teach Christians to look frater-

nally on Jews! David was a harper, but the setting of him down to roll off a fugue on one of your cathedral organs would not impose a heavier task than you are undertaking. You have my best wishes, whatever aid I can supply. But we're nearer to King John's time than to your ideal, as far as the Jews go."

"Not in England."

"Less in England," Abner shrugged.

"You have beaten the Christians on the field they challenged you to enter for a try. They feel the pinch in their interests and their vanity. That will pass. I'm for the two sides, under the name of Justice; and I give the palm to whichever of the two first gets hold of the idea of Justice. My old schoolmate's well?"

"Always asking after Matey Weyburn!"

"He shall have my address in Switzerland. You and I will be corresponding."

Now rose to view the visit to the lady who was Lady Ormont on the tongue, Aminta at heart; never to be named Aminta even to himself. His heart broke loose at a thought of it.

He might say Browny. For that was not serious with the intense present signification the name Aminta had. Browny was queen of the old school-time—

enclosed it in her name; and that sphere enclosed her, not excluding him. And the dear name of Browny played gently, humorously, fervently, too, with life: not pathetically, as that of Aminta did when came a whisper of her situation, her isolation, her friendlessness; hardly dissimilar to what could be imagined of a gazelle in the streets of London city. The Morsfields were not all slain. The Weyburns would be absent.

At the gate of his cottage garden Weyburn beheld a short unfamiliar figure of a man with dimly remembered features. Little Collett he still was in height. The schoolmates had not met since the old days of Cuper's.

Little Collett delivered a message of invitation from Selina, begging Mr. Weyburn to accompany her brother on the coach to Harwich next day, and spend two or three days by the sea. But Weyburn's mind had been set in the opposite direction—up Thames instead of down.

He was about to refuse, but he checked his voice and hummed. Words of Selina's letter jumped in italics. He perceived Lady Ormont's hand. For one thing, would she be at Great Marlow alone? And he knew that hand—how deftly it moved and moved others. Selina Collett would not have invited

him with underlinings merely to see a shoreside house and garden. Her silence regarding a particular name showed her to be under injunction, one might guess. At worst, it would be the loss of a couple of days; worth the venture. They agreed to journey by coach next day.

Facing eastward in the morning, on a seat behind the coachman, Weyburn had a seafaring man beside him, bound for the good port of Harwich, where his family lived, and thence by his own boat to Flushing. Weyburn set him talking of himself, as the best way of making him happy; for it is the theme which pricks to speech, and so liberates an uncomfortably locked-up stranger; who, if sympathetic to human proximity, is thankful. They exchanged names, delighted to find they were both Matthews; whereupon Matthew of the sea demanded the paw of Matthew of the land, and there was a squeeze. The same with little Collett, after hearing of him as the old school-mate of the established new friend. Then there was talk. Little Collett named Felixstowe as the village of his mother's house and garden sloping to the sands. "That's it—you have it," said the salted Matthew: "peace is in that spot, and there I've sworn to pitch my tent when I'm incapacitated for further exercise—profitable, so to speak. My eldest girl has

a bar of amber she picked up one wash of the tide at Felixstowe, and there it had been lying sparkling, unseen, hours, the shore is that solitary. What I like!—a quiet shore and a peopled sea. Ever been to Brighton? There it's t'other way."

Not long after he had mentioned the time of early evening for their entry into his port of Harwich, the coach turned quietly over on a bank of the road-side, depositing outside passengers quite safely, in so matter-of-course a way, that only the screams of an uninjured lady inside repressed their roars of laughter. One of the wheels had come loose, half a mile off the nearest town. Their entry into Harwich was thereby delayed until half-past nine at night. Full of consideration for the new mates now fast wedded to his heart by an accident, Matthew Shale proposed to Matthew Weyburn, instead of the bother of crossing the ferry with a portmanteau and a bag at that late hour, to sup at his house, try the neighbouring inn for a short sleep, and ship on board his yawl, the honest *Susan*, to be rowed ashore off the Swin to Felixstowe sands no later than six o'clock of a summer's morning, in time for a bath and a swim before breakfast. It sounded well—it sounded sweetly. Weyburn suggested the counter proposal of supper for the three at the inn. But the other

Matthew said: "I married a cook. She expects a big appetite, and she always keeps warm when I'm held away, no matter how late. Sure to be enough."

Beds were secured at the inn; after which came the introduction to Mrs. Shale, the exhibition of Susan Shale's bar of amber, the dish of fresh-fried whiting, the steak pudding, a grog, tobacco, rest at the inn, and a rousing bang at the sleepers' doors when the unwonted supper in them withheld an answer to the intimating knock. Young Matthew Shale, who had slept on board the *Susan,* conducted them to her boat. His glance was much drawn to the very white duck trousers Weyburn had put on, for a souvenir of the approbation they had won at Marlow. They were on, and so it was of no use for young Matthew to say they were likely to bear away a token from the *Susan.* She was one among the damsels of colour, and free of her tokens, especially to the spotless.

How it occurred, nobody saw; though everybody saw how naturally it must occur for the white ducks to "have it in the eye" by the time they had been on board a quarter of an hour. Weyburn got some fun out of them, for a counter-balance to a twitch of sentimental regret scarcely decipherable, as that the

last view of him should bear a likeness of Browny's recollection of her first.

A glorious morning of flushed open sky and sun on sea chased all small thoughts out of it. The breeze was from the west, and the *Susan*, lightly laden, took the heave of smooth rollers with a flowing current-curtsey in the motion of her speed. Fore-sail and aft were at their gentle strain; her shadow rippled fragmentarily along to the silver rivulet and boat of her wake. Straight she flew to the ball of fire now at spring above the waters, and raining red gold on the line of her bows. By comparison she was an ugly yawl, and as the creature of wind and wave beautiful.

They passed an English defensive fort, and spared its walls, in obedience to Matthew Shale's good counsel that they should forbear from sneezing. Little Collett pointed to the roof of his mother's house twenty paces rearward of a belt of tamarisks, green amid the hollowed yellows of shorebanks yet in shade, crumbling to the sands. Weyburn was attracted by a diminutive white tent, of sentry-box shape, evidently a bather's, quite as evidently a fair bather's. He would have to walk on some way for his dip. He remarked to little Collett that ladies going into the water half-dressed never have more than half a bath.

His arms and legs flung out contempt of that style of bathing, exactly in old Matey's well-remembered way.

Half a mile off shore, the *Susan* was put about to flap her sails, and her boat rocked with the passengers. Turning from a final cheer to friendly Matthew, Weyburn at the rudder espied one of those unenfranchised ladies in marine uniform issuing through the tent-slit. She stepped firmly, as into her element. A plain look at her, and a curious look, and an intent look fixed her fast, and ran the shock on his heart before he knew of a guess. She waded, she dipped; a head across the breast of the waters was observed: this one of them could swim. She was making for sea, a stone's throw off the direction of the boat. Before his wits had grasped the certainty possessing them, fiery envy and desire to be alongside her set his fingers fretting at buttons. A grand smooth swell of the waters lifted her, and her head rose to see her world. She sank down the valley, where another wave was mounding for its onward roll: a gentle scene of the *βᾶνι' ἐπιόντα* of Weyburn's favourite Sophoclean chorus. Now she was given to him—it was she. How could it ever have been any other! He handed his watch to little Collett, and gave him the ropes, pitched coat and

waistcoat on his knees, stood free of boots and socks, and, singing out, truly enough, the words of a popular cry, "White ducks want washing," went over and in.

CHAPTER XIII.

A MARINE DUET.

SHE soon had to know she was chased. She had seen the dive from the boat, and received an illumination. With a chuckle of delighted surprise, like a blackbird startled, she pushed seaward for joy of the effort, thinking she could exult in imagination of an escape up to the moment of capture, yielding then only to his greater will; and she meant to try it.

The swim was a holiday; all was new—nothing came to her as the same old thing since she took her plunge; she had a sea-mind—had left her earth-mind ashore. The swim, and Matey Weyburn pursuing her passed up, out of happiness, through the spheres of delirium, into the region where our life is as we would have it be: a home holding the quiet of the heavens, if but midway thither, and a home of delicious animation of the whole frame, equal to wings.

He drew on her, but he was distant, and she

waved an arm. The shout of her glee sprang from her: "Matey!" He waved; she heard his voice. Was it her name? He was not so drunken of the sea as she: he had not leapt out of bondage into buoyant waters, into a youth without a blot, without an aim, satisfied in tasting; the dream of the long felicity.

A thought brushed by her: How if he were absent?

It relaxed her stroke of arms and legs. He had doubled the salt sea's rapture, and he had shackled its gift of freedom. She turned to float, gathering her knees for the funny sullen kick, until she heard him near. At once her stroke was renewed vigorously; she had the foot of her pursuer, and she called, "Adieu, Matey Weyburn!"

Her bravado deserved a swifter humiliation than he was able to bring down on her: she swam bravely; and she was divine to see ahead as well as overtake.

Darting to the close parallel, he said: "What sea-nymph sang me my name?"

She smote a pang of her ecstasy into him: "Ask mine!"

"Browny!"

They swam; neither of them panted; their heads were water-flowers that spoke at ease.

"We've run from school; we won't go back."

"We've a kingdom."

"Here's a big wave going to be a wall."

"Off he rolls."

"He's like the High Brent broad meadow under Elling Wood."

"Don't let Miss Vincent hear you."

"They're not waves; they're sighs of the deep."

"A poet I swim with! He fell into the deep in his first of May morning ducks. We used to expect him."

"I never expected to owe them so much."

Pride of the swimmer and the energy of her joy embraced Aminta, that she might nerve all her powers to gain the half-minute for speaking at her ease.

"Who'd have thought of a morning like this? You were looked for last night."

"A lucky accident to our coach. I made friends with the skipper of the yawl."

"I saw the boat. Who could have dreamed——? Anything may happen now."

For nothing further would astonish her, as he rightly understood her; but he said: "You're prepared for the rites? Old Triton is ready."

"Float, and tell me."

They spun about to lie on their backs. Her right hand, at piano-work of the octave-shake, was touched and taken, and she did not pull it away. Her eyelids fell.

"Old Triton waits."

"Why?"

"We're going to him."

"Yes?"

"Customs of the sea."

"Tell me."

"He joins hands. We say, 'Browny—Matey,' and it's done."

She splashed, crying "Swim," and after two strokes, "You want to beat me, Matey Weyburn."

"How?"

"Not fair!"

"Say what."

"Take my breath. But, yes! we'll be happy in our own way. We're sea-birds. We've said adieu to land. Not to one another. We shall be friends?"

"Always."

"This is going to last?"

"Ever so long."

They had a spell of steady swimming, companionship to inspirit it. Browny was allowed place a little

foremost, and she guessed not wherefore, in her flattered emulation.

"I'm bound for France."

"Slew a point to the right: South-east by South. We shall hit Dunkerque."

"I don't mean to be picked up by boats."

"We'll decline."

"You see I can swim."

"I was sure of it."

They stopped their talk—for the pleasure of the body to be savoured in the mind, they thought; and so took Nature's counsel to rest their voices awhile.

Considering that she had not been used of late to long immersions, and had not broken her fast, and had talked much, for a sea-nymph, Weyburn spied behind him on a shore seeming flat down, far removed.

"France next time," he said: "we'll face to the rear."

"Now?" said she, big with blissful conceit of her powers and incredulous of such a command from him.

"You may be feeling tired presently."

The musical sincerity of her "Oh no, not I!" sped through his limbs; he had a willingness to go onward still some way.

But his words fastened the heavy land on her spirit, knocked at the habit of obedience. Her stroke of the arms paused. She inclined to his example, and he set it shoreward.

They swam silently, high, low, creatures of the smooth green roller. He heard the water-song of her swimming.

She, though breathing equably at the nostrils, lay deep. The water shocked at her chin, and curled round the under lip. He had a faint anxiety; and, not so sensible of a weight in the sight of land as she was, he chattered, by snatches, rallied her, encouraged her to continue sportive for this once, letting her feel it was but a once and had its respected limit with him. So it was not out of the world.

Ah, friend Matey! And that was right and good on land; but rightness and goodness flung earth's shadow across her brilliancy here, and any stress on "this once" withdrew her liberty to revel in it, putting an end to perfect holiday; and silence, too, might hint at fatigue. She began to think her muteness lost her the bloom of the enchantment, robbing her of her heavenly frolic lead, since friend Matey resolved to be as eminently good in salt water

as on land. Was he unaware that they were boy and girl again?—she washed pure of the intervening years, new born, by blessing of the sea; worthy of him here!—that is, a swimmer worthy of him, his comrade in salt water.

"You're satisfied I swim well?" she said.

"It would go hard with me if we raced a long race."

"I really was out for France."

"I was ordered to keep you for England."

She gave him Browny's eyes.

"We've turned our backs on Triton."

"The ceremony was performed."

"When?"

"The minute I spoke of it and you splashed."

"Matey! Matey Weyburn!"

"Browny Farrell!"

"Oh, Matey! she's gone!"

"She's here."

"Try to beguile me, then, that our holiday's not over. You won't forget this hour?"

"No time of mine on earth will live so brightly for me."

"I have never had one like it. I could go under and be happy; go to old Triton, and wait for you; teach him to speak your proper Christian name. He

hasn't heard it yet,—heard 'Matey,'—never yet has been taught 'Matthew.'"

"Aminta!"

"Oh, my friend! my dear!" she cried, in the voice of the wounded, like a welling of her blood: "my strength will leave me. I may play—not you: you play with a weak vessel. Swim, and be quiet. How far do you count it?"

"Under a quarter of a mile."

"Don't imagine me tired."

"If you are, hold on to me."

"Matey, I'm for a dive."

He went after the ball of silver and bubbles, and they came up together. There is no history of events below the surface.

She shook off her briny blindness, and settled to the full sweep of the arms, quite silent now. Some emotion, or exhaustion from the strain of the swimmer's breath in speech, stopped her playfulness. The pleasure she still knew was a recollection of the outward swim, when she had been privileged to cast away sex with the push from earth, as few men will believe that women, beautiful women, ever wish to do; and often and ardently during the run ahead they yearn for Nature to grant them their one short holiday truce.

But Aminta forgave him for bringing earth so close to her when there was yet a space of salt water between her and shore; and she smiled at times, that he might not think she was looking grave.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PLIGHTING.

THEY touched sand at the first draw of the ebb, and this being earth, Matey addressed himself to the guardian and absolving genii of matter-of-fact, by saying: "Did you inquire about the tides?"

Her head shook, stunned with what had passed. She waded to shore, after motioning for him to swim on.

Men, in the comparison beside their fair fellows, are so little sensationally complex, that his one feeling now, as to what had passed, was relief at the idea of his presence having been a warrantable protectorship.

Aminta's return from the sea-nymph to the state of woman crossed annihilation on the way back to sentience, and picked up meaningless pebbles and shells of life, between the sea's verge and her tent's shelter; hardly her own life to her understanding yet, except for the hammer Memory became, to strike her

insensible, at here and there a recollected word or nakedness of her soul.

He swam along by the shore to where the boat was paddled, spying at her bare feet on the sand, her woman's form. He waved, and the figure in the striped tunic and trousers waved her response, apparently the same person he had quitted.

Dry and clad, and decently formal under the transformation, they met at Mrs. Collett's breakfast-table, and in each hung the doubt whether land was the dream or sea. Both owned to a swim; both omitted mention of the tale of white ducks. Little Collett had brought Matey's and his portmanteau into the house, by favour of the cook, through the scullery. He, who could have been a pictorial and suggestive narrator, carried a spinning head off his shoulders from this wonderful Countess of Ormont to Matey Weyburn's dark-eyed Browny at High Brent, and the Sunday walk in Sir Peter Wensell's park. Away and back his head went. Browny was not to be thought of as Browny; she was this grand Countess of Ormont; she had married Matey Weyburn's hero: she would never admit she had been Browny. Only she was handsome then, and she is handsome now; and she looks on Matey Weyburn now just as she did then. How strange is the world! Or how if we are the

particular person destined to encounter the strange things of the world? And fancy J. Masner, and Pinnett major, and young Oakes (liked nothing better than a pretty girl, he strutted boasting at thirteen), and the Frenchy, and the lot, all popping down at the table, and asked the name of the lady sitting like Queen Esther—how they would roar out! Boys, of course —but men, too!—very few men have a notion of the extraordinary complications and coincidences and cracker-surprises life contains. Here's an instance: Matey Weyburn positively will wear white ducks to play before Aminta Farrell on the first of May cricketing-day. He happens to have his white ducks on when he sees the Countess of Ormont swimming in the sea; and so he can go in just as if they were all-right bathing-drawers. In he goes, has a good long swim with her, and when he comes out, says, of his dripping ducks, "tabula votiva . . . avida vestimenta," to remind an old schoolmate of his hopping to the booth at the end of a showery May day, and dedicating them to the laundry in these words. It seems marvellous.

It was a quaint revival, an hour after breakfast, for little Collett to be acting as intermediary with Selina to request Lady Ormont's grant of a five-minutes' interview before the church-bell summoned

her. She was writing letters, and sent the message: "Tell Mr. Weyburn I obey." Selina delivered it, uttering "obey" in a demurely comical way, as a word of which the humour might be comprehensible to him.

Aminta stood at the drawing-room window. She was asking herself whether her recent conduct shrieked coquette to him, or any of the abominable titles showered on the women who take free breath of air one day after long imprisonment.

She said: "Does it mean you are leaving us?" the moment he was near.

"Not till evening or to-morrow, as it may happen," he answered: "I have one or two things to say, if you will spare the time."

"All my time," said she, smiling to make less of the heart's reply; and he stepped into the room.

They had not long back been Matey and Browny, and though that was in another element, it would not sanction the Lady Ormont and Mr. Weyburn now. As little could it be Aminta and Matthew. Brother and sister they were in the spirit's world, but in this world the titles had a sound of imposture. And with a great longing to call her by some allying name, he rejected "friend" for its insufficiency and commonness, notwithstanding the en-

tirely friendly nature of the burden to be spoken. Friend, was a title that ran on quicksands: an excuse that tried for an excuse. He distinguished in himself simultaneously, that the hesitation and beating about for a name had its origin in an imperfect frankness when he sent his message: the fretful desire to be with her, close to her, hearing her, seeing her, besides the true wish to serve her. He sent it after swinging round abruptly from an outlook over the bordering garden tamarisks on a sea now featureless, desolately empty.

However, perceptibly silence was doing the work of a scourge, and he said: "I have been thinking I may have—and I don't mind fighting hard to try it before I leave England on Tuesday or Wednesday —some influence with Lady Charlotte Eglett. She is really one of the true women living, and the heartiest of backers, if she can be taught to see her course. I fancy I can do that. She's narrow, but she is not one of the class who look on the working world below them as, we'll say, the scavenger dogs on the plains of Ilium were seen by the Achaeans. And my failure would be no loss to you! Your name shall not be alluded to as empowering me to plead for her help. But I want your consent, or I may be haunted and weakened by the idea of play-

ing the busy-body. One has to feel strong in a delicate position. Well, you know what my position with her has been—one among the humble; and she has taken contradictions, accepted views from me, shown me she has warmth of heart to an extreme degree."

Aminta slightly raised her hand. "I will save you trouble. I have written to Lord Ormont. I have left him."

Their eyes engaged on the thunder of this.

"The letter has gone?"

"It was posted before my swim: posted yesterday."

"You have fully and clearly thought it out to a determination?"

"Bit by bit—I might say, blow by blow."

"It is no small matter to break a marriage-tie."

"I have conversed with your mother."

"Yes, she! and the woman happiest in marriage!"

"I know. It was hatred of injustice, noble sympathy. And she took me for one of the blest among wives."

"She loved God. She saw the difference between men's decrees for their convenience, and God's

laws. She felt for women. You have had a hard trial, Aminta."

"Oh, my name! You mean it?"

"You heard it from me this morning."

"Yes, there! I try to forget. I lost my senses. You may judge me harshly, on reflection."

"Judge myself worse, then. You had a thousand excuses. I had only my love of you. There's no judgment against either of us, for us to see, if I read rightly. We elect to be tried in the courts of the sea-god. Now we'll sit and talk it over. The next ten minutes will decide our destinies."

His eyes glittered, otherwise he showed the coolness of the man discussing business; and his blunt soberness refreshed and upheld her, as a wild burst of passion would not have done.

Side by side, partly facing, they began their interchange.

"You have weighed what you abandon?"

"It weighs little."

"That may be error. You have to think into the future."

"My sufferings and experiences are not bad guides."

"They count. How can you be sure you have all the estimates?"

"Was I ever a wife?"

"You were and are the Countess of Ormont."

"Not to the world. An unacknowledged wife is a slave, surely."

"You step down, if you take the step."

"From what? Once I did desire that station—had an idea it was glorious. I despise it: or rather the woman who had the desire."

"But the step down is into the working world."

"I have means to live humbly. I want no more, except to be taught to work."

"So says the minute. Years are before you. You have weighed well, that you attract?"

She reddened and murmured: "How small!" Her pout of spite at her attractions was little simulated.

"Beauty and charm are not small matters. You have the gift, called fatal. Then—looking right forward—you have faith in the power of resistance of the woman living alone?"

He had struck at her breast. From her breast she replied.

"Hear this of me. I was persecuted with letters. I read them and did not destroy them. Perhaps you saved me. Looking back, I see weakness, nothing worse; but it is a confession."

"Yes, you have courage. And that comes of a great heart. And therein lies the danger."

"Advise me of what is possible to a lonely woman."

"You have resolved on the loneliness?"

"It means breathing to me."

"You are able to see that Lord Ormont is a gentleman?"

"A chivalrous gentleman, up to the bounds of his intelligence."

The bounds of his intelligence closed their four walls in a rapid narrowing slide on Aminta's mind, and she exclaimed:

"If only to pluck flowers in fields and know their names, I must be free! I say what one can laugh at, and you are good and don't. Is the interrogatory exhausted?"

"Aminta, my beloved, if you are free, I claim you."

"Have you thought——?"

The sense of a dissolving to a fountain quivered through her veins.

"Turn the tables and examine me."

"But have you thought—oh! I am not the girl

you loved. I would go through death to feel I was, and give you one worthy of you."

"That means what I won't ask you to speak at present: but I must have proof."

He held out a hand, and hers was laid in his.

There was more for her to say, she knew. It came and fled, lightened and darkened. She had yielded her hand to him here on land, not with the licence and protection of the great holiday salt water; and she was trembling from the run of his blood through hers at the pressure of hands, when she said in undertones: "Could we—we might be friends."

"Meet and part as friends, you and I," he replied.

His voice carried the answer for her, his intimate look had in it the unfolding of the full flower of the woman to him, as she could not conceal from such eyes; and feeling that, she was all avowal.

"It is for life, Matthew."

"My own words to myself when I first thought of the chance."

"But the school?"

"I shall not consider that we are malefactors. We have the world against us. It will not keep us from trying to serve it. And there are hints of humaner opinions; it's not all a huge rolling block of a Juggernaut. Our case could be pleaded before it. I don't think the just would condemn us heavily. I shall have to ask you to strengthen me, complete me. If you love me, it is your leap out of prison, and without you, I am from this time no better than one-third of a man. I trust you to weigh the position you lose, and the place we choose to take in the world. It's this—I think this describes it. You know the man who builds his house below the sea's level has a sleepless enemy always threatening. His house must be firm and he must look to the dykes. We commit this indiscretion. With a world against us, our love and labour are constantly on trial; we must have great hearts, and if the world is hostile we are not to blame it. In the nature of things it could not be otherwise. My own soul, we have to see that we do—though not publicly, not insolently—offend good citizenship. But we believe—I with my whole faith, and I may say it of you—that we are not offending Divine law. You are the woman I can help and join with; think

whether you can tell yourself that I am the man. So, then, our union gives us powers to make amends to the world, if the world should grant us a term of peace for the effort. That is our risk; consider it, Aminta, between now and to-morrow; deliberate. We don't go together into a garden of roses."

"I know. I should feel shame. I wish it to look dark," said Aminta, her hand in his, and yet with a fair-sailing mind on the stream of the blood.

Rationally and irrationally, the mixed passion and reason in two clear heads and urgent hearts discussed the stand they made before a world defied, neither of them quite perceiving what it was which coloured reason to beauty, or what so convinced their intellects when passion spoke the louder.

"I am to have a mate."

"She will pray she may be one."

"She is my first love."

Aminta's lips formed "mine," without utterance.

Meanwhile his hand or a wizardry subdued her will, allured her body. She felt herself being drawn to the sign and seal of their plighting for life. She said, "Matthew," softly in protest; and he said, "Never

e yet!" She was owing to his tenderness. Her pened voice murmured: "Is this to deliberate?" our flooded the beautiful dark face, as of the ɛral hues of a sun suffusing all the heavens, firing h.

CHAPTER XV.

AMINTA TO HER LORD.

On Friday, on Saturday, on Sunday, Lady Charlotte waited for her brother Rowsley, until it was a diminished satisfaction that she had held her ground and baffled his mighty will to subdue her. She did not sleep for thinking of him on the Sunday night. Toward morning a fit of hazy horrors, which others would have deemed imaginings, drove her from her bed to sit and brood over Rowsley in a chair. What if it was a case of heart with him too? Heart disease had been in the family. A man like Rowsley, still feeling the world before him, as a man of his energies and *aptitudes*, her humour added in the tide of her anxieties, had a right to feel, would not fall upon resignation like a woman.

She was at the physician's door at eight o'clock. Dr. Rewkes reported reassuringly; it was a simple disturbance in Lord Ormont's condition of health, and he conveyed just enough of disturbance to send

the impetuous lady knocking and ringing at her brother's door upon the hour of nine.

The announcement of Lady Charlotte's early visit informed my lord that Dr. Rewkes had done the spiriting required of him. He descended to the library and passed under scrutiny.

"You don't look ill, Rowsley," she said, reluctantly in the sound.

"I am the better for seeing you here, Charlotte. Shall I order breakfast for you? I am alone."

"I know you are. I've eaten. Rewkes tells me you've not lost appetite."

"Have I the appearance of a man who has lost anything?" Prouder man, and heartier and ruddier, could not be seen, she thought.

"You're winning the country to right you; that I know."

"I don't ask it."

"The country wants your services."

"I have heard some talk of it. That lout comes to a knowledge of his wants too late. If they promoted and offered me the command in India tomorrow——" My lord struck the arm of his chair. "I live at Steignton henceforth; my wife is at a seaside place eastward. She left the jewel-case when

on her journey through London for safety; she is a particularly careful person, forethoughtful. I take her down to Steignton two days after her return. We entertain there in the autumn. You come?"

"I don't. I prefer decent society."

"You are in her house now, ma'am."

"If I have to meet the person you mean, I shall be civil. The society you've given her, I won't meet."

"You will have to meet the Countess of Ormont if you care to meet your brother."

"Part, then, on the best terms we can. I say this, the woman who keeps you from serving your country, she's your country's enemy."

"Hear my answer. The lady who is my wife has had to suffer for what you call my country's treatment of me. It's a choice between my country and her. I give her the rest of my time."

"That's dotage."

"Fire away your epithets."

"Sheer dotage. I don't deny she's a handsome young woman."

"You'll have to admit that Lady Ormont takes her place in our family with the best we can name."

"You insult my ears, Rowsley."

"The world will say it when it has the honour of her acquaintance."

"An honour suspiciously deferred."

"That's between the world and me."

"Set your head to work, you'll screw the world to any pitch you like—that I don't need telling."

Lord Ormont's head approved the remark.

"Now," said Lady Charlotte, "you won't get the Danmores, the Dukerlys, the Carminters, the Oxbridges any more than you get me."

"You are wrong, ma'am. I had yesterday a reply from Lady Danmore to a communication of mine."

"It's thickening. But while I stand, I stand for the family; and I'm not in it, and while I stand out of it, there's a doubt either of your honesty or your sanity."

"There's a perfect comprehension of my sister!"

"I put my character in the scales against your conduct, and your Countess of Ormont's reputation into the bargain."

"You have called at her house; it's a step. You'll be running at her heels next. She's not obdurate."

"When you see me running at her heels, it'll be with my head off. Stir your hardest, and let it thicken. That man Morsfield's name mixed up with a sham Countess of Ormont, in the stories flying

abroad, can't hurt anybody. A true Countess of Ormont—we're cut to the quick."

"We're cut! Your quick, Charlotte, is known to court the knife."

Letters of the morning's post were brought in.

The earl turned over a couple and took up a third, saying: "I'll attend to you in two minutes;" and thinking once more: Queer world it is, where, when you sheath the sword, you have to be at play with bodkins!

Lady Charlotte gazed on the carpet, effervescent with retorts to his last observation, rightly conjecturing that the letter he selected to read was from "his Aminta."

The letter apparently was interesting or it was of inordinate length. He seemed still to be reading. He reverted to the first page.

At the sound of the paper, she discarded her cogitations and glanced up. His countenance had become stony. He read on some way, with a sudden drop on the signature, a recommencement, a sound in the throat, as when men grasp a comprehensible sentence of a muddled rigmarole and begin to have hopes of the remainder. But the eye on the page is not the eye which reads.

"No bad news, Rowsley?"

The earl's breath fell heavily.

Lady Charlotte left her chair, and walked about the room.

"Rowsley, I'd like to hear if I can be of use."

"Ma'am?" he said; and pondered on the word "use," staring at her.

"I don't intend to pry. I can't see my brother look like that, and not ask."

The letter was tossed on the table to her.

She read these lines, dated from Felixstowe:

"My dear Lord,

"The courage I have long been wanting in has come at last, to break a tie that I have seen too clearly was a burden on you from the beginning. I will believe that I am chiefly responsible for inducing you to contract it. The alliance with an inexperienced girl of inferior birth, and a perhaps immoderate ambition, has taxed your generosity; and though the store may be inexhaustible, it is not truly the married state when a wife subjects the husband to such a trial. The release is yours, the sadness is for me. I have latterly seen or suspected a design on your part to meet my former wishes for a public recognition of the wife of Lord Ormont. Let me now say that these foolish wishes no longer exist. I rejoice

to think that my staying or going will be alike unknown to the world. I have the means of a livelihood, in a modest way, and shall trouble no one.

"I have said, the sadness is for me. That is truth. But I have to add, that I, too, am sensible of the release. My confession of a change of feeling to you as a wife, writes the close of all relations between us. I am among the dead for you; and it is a relief to me to reflect on the little pain I give . . ."

"Has she something on her conscience about that man Morsfield?" Lady Charlotte cried.

Lord Ormont's prolonged "Ah!" of execration rolled her to a bundle.

Nevertheless, her human nature and her knowledge of woman's, would out with the words: "There's a man!"

She allowed her brother to be correct in repudiating the name of the dead Morsfield—chivalrous as he was on this Aminta's behalf to the last!—and struck along several heads, Adderwood's, Weyburn's, Randeller's, for the response to her suspicion. A man there certainly was. He would be probably a young man. He would not necessarily be a handsome man . . . . or a titled or a wealthy man. She

might have set eyes on a gypsy somewhere round Great Marlow—blood to blood; such things have been. Imagining a wildish man for her, rather than a handsome one and one devoted staidly to the founding of a school, she overlooked Weyburn, or reserved him with others for subsequent speculation.

The remainder of Aminta's letter referred to her delivery of the Ormont jewel-case at Lord Ormont's London house, under charge of her maid Carstairs. The affairs of the household were stated very succinctly, the drawer for labelled keys, whatever pertained to her management, in London or at Great Marlow.

"She's cool," Lady Charlotte said, after reading out the orderly array of items, in a tone of rasping irony, to convince her brother he was well rid of a heartless wench.

Aminta's written statement of those items were stabs at the home she had given him, a flashed picture of his loss. Nothing written by her touched him to pierce him so shrewdly; nothing could have brought him so closely the breathing image in the flesh of the woman now a phantom for him.

"Will she be expecting you to answer, Rowsley?"

"Will that forked tongue cease hissing!" he shouted, in the agony of a strong man convulsed

both to render and conceal the terrible, shameful, unexampled gush of tears.

Lady Charlotte beheld her bleeding giant. She would rather have seen the brother of her love grimace in woman's manner than let loose those rolling big drops down the face of a rock. The big sob shook him, and she was shaken to the dust by the sight. Now she was advised by her deep affection for her brother to sit patient and dumb, behind shaded eyes: praising in her heart the incomparable force of the man's love of the woman contrasted with the puling inclinations of the woman for the man.

Neither opened mouth when they separated. She pressed and kissed a large nerveless hand. Lord Ormont stood up to bow her forth. His ruddied skin had gone to pallor resembling the berg of ice on the edge of Arctic seas, when sunlight has fallen away from it.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

THE peaceful little home on the solitary sandy shore was assailed, unwarned, beneath a quiet sky, some hours later, by a whirlwind, a dust-storm, and rattling volleys. Miss Vincent's discovery, in the past schooldays, of Selina Collett's "wicked complicity in a clandestine correspondence" had memorably chastened the girl, who vowed at the time when her schoolmistress, using the rod of Johnsonian English for the purpose, exposed the depravity of her sinfulness, that she would never again be guilty of a like offence. Her dear and lovely Countess of Ormont, for whom she then uncomplainingly suffered, who deigned now to call her friend, had spoken the kind good-bye, and left the house after Mr. Weyburn's departure that same day; she, of course, to post by Harwich to London; he to sail by packet from the port of Harwich for Flushing. The card of an unknown lady, a great lady, the Lady Charlotte Eglett,

was handed to her mother at eight o'clock in the evening.

Lady Charlotte was introduced to the innocent country couple; the mother knitting, the daughter studying a book of the botany of the Swiss Alps, dreaming a distant day's journey over historic lands of various hues to the unimaginable spectacle of earth's grandeur. Her visit lasted fifteen minutes. From the moment of her entry, the room was in such turmoil as may be seen where a water-mill wheel's paddles are suddenly set rounding to pour streams of foam on the smooth pool below. A relentless catechism bewildered their hearing. Mrs. Collett attempted an opposition of dignity to those vehement attacks for answers. It was flooded and rolled over. She was put upon her honour to reply positively to positive questions: whether the Countess of Ormont was in this house at present; whether the Countess of Ormont left the house alone or in company; whether a gentleman had come to the house during the stay of the Countess of Ormont; whether Lady Ormont had left the neighbourhood; the exact time of the day when she quitted the house, and the stated point of her destination.

Ultimately, protesting that they were incapable of telling what they did not know—which Lady

Charlotte heard with an incredulous shrug—they related piecemeal what they did know, and Weyburn's name gave her scent. She paid small heed to the tale of Mr. Weyburn's having come there in the character of young Mr. Collett's old schoolmate. Mr. Weyburn had started for the port of Harwich. This day, and not long subsequently, Lady Ormont had started for the port of Harwich. Further corroboration was quite superfluous.

"Is there a night packet-boat from this port of yours?" Lady Charlotte asked.

The household servants had to be consulted; and she, hurriedly craving the excuse of their tedious mistress, elicited, as far as she could understand them, that there might be and very nearly was, a night packet-boat starting for Flushing. The cook, a native of Harwich, sent up word of a night packet-boat starting at about eleven o'clock last year.

Lady Charlotte saw the chance as a wind-blown beacon-fire under press of shades. Changing her hawkish manner toward the simple pair, she gave them view of a smile magical by contrast, really beautiful—the smile she had in reserve for serviceable persons whom she trusted—while thanking them and saying, that her anxiety concerned Lady Ormont's welfare.

Her brother had prophesied she would soon be "running at his wife's heels," and so she was; but not "with her head off," as she had rejoined. She might prove, by intercepting his Aminta, that her head was on. The windy beacon-fire of a chance blazed at the rapid rolling of her carriage-wheels, and sank to stifling smoke at any petty obstruction. Let her but come to an interview with his Aminta, she would stop all that nonsense of the woman's letter; carry her off—and her Weyburn plucking at her other hand to keep her. Why, naturally, treated as she was by Rowsley, she dropped soft eyes on a good-looking secretary. Any woman would—confound the young fellow! But all's right yet if we get to Harwich in time; unless . . . as a certain cold-fish finale tone of the letter playing on the old string, the irrevocable, peculiar to women who are novices in situations of the kind, appeared to indicate; they see in their conscience-blasted minds a barrier to a return home, high as the Archangelical gate behind Mother Eve, and they are down on their knees blubbering gratitude and repentance if the gate swings open to them. It is just the instant, granting the catastrophe, to have a woman back to her duty. She has only to learn she has a magnanimous husband. If she learns into the bargain how he suffers,

how he loves her,—well, she despises a man like that Lawrence Finchley all the more for the "magnanimity" she has the profit of, and perceives to be feebleness. But here's woman in her good and her bad; she'll trick a man of age, and if he forgives her, owning his own faults in the case, she won't scorn him for it; the likelihood is, she'll feel bound in honour to serve him faithfully for the rest of their wedded days.

A sketch to her of Rowsley's deep love. . . . Lady Charlotte wandered into an amazement at it. A sentence of her brother's recent speaking danced in her recollection. He said of his country: *That Lout comes to a knowledge of his wants too late.* True, Old England is always louting to the rear, and has to be pricked in the rear and pulled by the neck before she's equal to the circumstances around her. But what if his words were flung at him in turn! Short of "Lout," it rang correctly. "Too late," we hope to clip from the end of the sentence likewise. We have then, if you stress it—*"comes to a knowledge of his wants";*—a fair example of the creatures men are; the greatest of men; who have to learn from the loss of the woman—or a fear of the loss—how much they really do love her.

Well, and she may learn the same or something

sufficiently like it, if she's caught in time, called to her face, Countess of Ormont, sister-in-law, and smoothed, petted, made believe she's now understood and won't be questioned on a single particular—in fact, she marches back in a sort of triumph; and all the past in a cupboard, locked up, without further inquiry.

Her brother Rowsley's revealed human appearance of the stricken man—stricken right into his big heart—precipitated Lady Charlotte's reflections and urged her to an unavailing fever of haste during the circuitous drive in moonlight to the port. She alighted at the principal inn, and was there informed that the packet-boat, with a favouring breeze and tide, had started ten minutes earlier. She summoned the landlord, and described a lady, as probably one of the passengers: "Dark, holds herself up high." Some such lady had dined at the inn on tea, and gone aboard the boat soon after.

Lady Charlotte burned with the question: Alone? She repressed her feminine hunger and asked to see the book of visitors. But the lady had not slept at the inn, so had not been requested to write her name.

The track of the vessel could be seen from the pier, on the line of a bar of moonlight; and thinking,

that the abominable woman, if aboard she was, had coolly provided herself with a continental passport—or had it done for two by her accomplice, that Weyburn, before she left London—Lady Charlotte sent a loathing gaze at the black figure of the boat on the water, untroubled by any reminder of her share in the conspiracy of events, which was to be her brother's chastisement to his end.

Years are the teachers of the great rocky natures, whom they round and sap and pierce in caverns, having them on all sides, and striking deep inward at moments. There is no resisting the years, if we have a heart, and a common understanding. They constitute, in the sum of them, the self-examination, whence issues, acknowledged or not, a belated self-knowledge, to direct our final actions. She had the heart. Sight of the high-minded, proud, speechless man suffering for the absence of a runaway woman, not ceasing to suffer, never blaming the woman, and consequently, it could be fancied, blaming himself, broke down Lady Charlotte's defences and moved her to review her part in her brother Rowsley's unhappiness. For supposing him to blame himself, her power to cast a shadow of blame on him went from her, and therewith her vindication of her conduct. He lived at Olmer. She read him by degrees, as

those who have become absolutely tongueless have to be read; and so she gathered that this mortally (or lastingly) wounded brother of hers was pleased by an allusion to his Aminta. He ran his finger on the lines of a map of Spain, from Barcelona over to Granada; and impressed his nail at a point appearing to be mountainous or woody. Lady Charlotte suggested that he and his Aminta had passed by there. He told a story of a carriage accident: added, "She was very brave." One day, when he had taken a keepsake book of England's Beauties off the drawing-room table, his eyes dwelt on a face awhile, and he handed it, with a nod, followed by a slight depreciatory shrug.

"Like her, not so handsome," Lady Charlotte said.

He nodded again. She came to a knowledge of Aminta's favourite colours through the dwelling of his look on orange and black, deepest rose, light yellow, light blue. Her grand-daughters won the satisfied look if they wore a combination touching his memory. The rocky are not imaginative, and have to be struck from without for a kindling of them. Submissive though she was to court and soothe her brother Rowsley, a spur of jealousy burned in the composition of her sentiments, to set

her going. He liked visiting Mrs. Lawrence Finchley at her effaced good man's country seat, Brockholm in Berkshire, and would stay there a month at a time. Lady Charlotte learnt why. The enthusiast for Aminta, without upholding her to her late lord, whom she liked well, talked of her openly with him, confessed to a fondness for her. How much Mrs. Lawrence ventured to say, Lady Charlotte could not know. But rivalry pushed her to the extreme of making Aminta partially a topic; and so ready was he to follow her lead in the veriest trifles recalling the handsome runaway, that she had to excite his racy diatribes against the burgess English and the pulp they have made of a glorious nation, in order not to think him inclining upon dotage.

Philippa's occasional scoff in fun concerning 'grandmama's tutor," hurt Lady Charlotte for more reasons than one, notwithstanding the justification of her fore-thoughtfulness. The girl, however, was privileged; she was Bobby Benlew's dearest friend, and my lord loved the boy; with whom nothing could be done at school, nor could a tutor at Olmer control him. In fine, Bobby saddened the family and gained the earl's anxious affection by giving daily proofs of his being an Ormont in a weak frame; patently an Ormont, recurrently an invalid. His

moral qualities hurled him on his physical deficiencies. The local doctor and Dr. Rewkes banished him twice to the seashore, where he began to bloom the first week and sickened the next, for want of playfellows, jolly fights and friendships. Ultimately they prescribed mountain air, Swiss air, easy travelling to Switzerland, and several weeks of excursions at the foot of the Alps. Bobby might possibly get an aged tutor, or find an English clergyman taking pupils, on the way.

Thus it happened, that seven years after his bereavement, Lord Ormont and Philippa and Bobby were on the famous Bernese Terrace, grandest of terrestrial theatres where soul of man has fronting him earth's utmost majesty. Sublime: but five minutes of it fetched sounds as of a plug in an empty phial from Bobby's bosom, and his heels became electrical.

He was observed at play with a gentleman of Italian complexion. Past guessing how it had come about, for the gentleman was an utter stranger. He had at any rate the tongue of an Englishman. He had the style, too, the slang and cries and tricks of an English schoolboy, though visibly a foreigner. And he had the art of throwing his heart into that

bit of improvised game, or he would never have got hold of Bobby, shrewd to read a masker.

Lugged-up by the boy to my lord and the young lady, he doffed and bowed. "Forgive me, pray," he said; "I can't see an English boy without having a spin with him; and I make so bold as to speak to English people wherever I meet them, if they give me the chance. Bad manners? Better than that. You are of the military profession, sir, I see. I am a soldier, fresh from Monte Video. Italian, it is evident, under an Italian chief there. A clerk on a stool, and *hey presto* plunged into the war a month after, shouldering a gun and marching. Fifteen battles in eighteen months; and Death a lady at a balcony we kiss hands to on the march below. Not a bit more terrible! Ah, but your pardon, sir," he hastened to say, observing rigidity on the features of the English gentleman; "would I boast? Not I. Accept it as my preface for why I am moved to speak the English wherever I meet them: Uruguay, Buenos Ayres, La Plata, or Europe. I cannot resist it. At least," he bent gracefully, "I do not. We come to the grounds of my misbehaviour. I have shown at every call I fear nothing, kiss hand of welcome or adieu to Death. And I, a boy of the age of this youngster—he's not like me, I can declare!

—I was a sneak and a coward. It follows, I was a liar and a traitor. Who cured me of that vileness, that scandal? I will tell you—an Englishman and an Englishwoman: my schoolmaster and his wife. My schoolmaster—my friend! He is the comrade of his boys: English, French, Germans, Italians, a Spaniard in my time—a South American I have sent him—two from Boston, Massachusetts—and clever!—all emulous to excel, none boasting. But, to myself; I was that mean fellow. I did—I could let you know: before this young lady—she would wither me with her scorn. Enough, I sneaked, I lied. I let the blame fall on a schoolfellow and a housemaid. Oh! a small thing, but I coveted it—a scarf. It reminded me of Rome. Enough, there at the bottom of that pit, behold me. It was not discovered, but my schoolfellow was unpunished, the housemaid remained in service; I thought, I thought, and I thought until I could not look in my dear friend Matthew's face. He said to me one day: 'Have you nothing to tell me, Giulio?' as if to ask the road to right or left. Out it all came. And no sermon, no! He set me the hardest task I could have. That was a penance!—to go to his wife, and tell it all to her. Then I did think it an easier thing to go and face death—and death had been my nightmare. I went,

she listened, she took my hand: she said: 'You will never do this again, I know, Giulio.' She told me no English girl would ever look on a man who was a coward and lied. From that day I have made Truth my bride. And what the consequence? I know not fear! I could laugh, knowing I was to lie down in my six-foot measure to-morrow. If I have done my duty and look in the face of my dear Matthew and his wife! Ah, those two! They are loved. They will be loved all over Europe. He works for Europe and America—all civilised people —to be one country. He is the comrade of his boys. Out of school hours, it is Christian names all round—Matthew, Emile, Adolf, Emilio, Giulio, Robert, Marcel, Franz, et cætera. Games or lessons, a boy can't help learning with him. He makes happy fellows and brave soldiers of them without drill. Sir, do I presume when I say I have your excuse for addressing you because you are his countryman? I drive to the old school in half an hour, and next week he and his dear wife and a good half of the boys will be on the tramp over the Simplon, by Lago Maggiore, to my uncle's house in Milan for a halt. I go to Matthew before I see my own people."

He swept another bow of apology, chiefly to Philippa, as representative of the sex claiming homage.

Lord Ormont had not greatly relished certain of the flowery phrases employed by this young foreigner. "Truth his bride" was damnable: and if a story had to be told, he liked it plain, without jerks and evolutions. Many offences to our taste have to be overlooked in foreigners—Italians! considered, before they were proved in fire, a people classed by nature as operatic declaimers. Bobby had shown himself on the road out to Bern a difficult boy, and stupefyingly ignorant. My lord had two or three ideas working to cloudy combination in his head when he put a question, referring to the management of the dormitories at the school. Whereupon the young Italian introduced himself as Guilio Calliani, and proposed a drive to inspect the old school, with its cricket and football fields, lake for rowing and swimming, gymnastic fixtures, carpenter's shed, bowling alley, and four European languages in the air by turns daily; and the boys, too, all the boys rosy and jolly, according to the last report received of them from his friend Matthew.

Enthusiasm struck and tightened the loose chord of scepticism in Lord Ormont; somewhat as if a dancing beggar had entered a kennel-dog's yard, designing to fascinate the faithful beast. It is a chord of one note, that is tightened to sound by the

violent summons to accept, which is a provocation to deny. At the same time, the enthusiast's dance is rather funny; he is not an ordinary beggar; to see him trip himself in his dance would be rather funnier. This is to say, inspect the trumpeted school and retire politely. My lord knew the Bern of frequent visits: the woman was needed beside him to inspire a feeling for scenic mountains. Philippa's admiration of them was like a new-pressed grape-juice after a draught of the ripe vintage. Moreover, Bobby was difficult; the rejected of his English schools was a stiff Ormont at lessons, a wheezy Benlew in the playground: exactly the reverse of what should have been. A school of four languages in bracing air, if a school with healthy dormitories, and a school of the trained instincts we call gentlemanly, might suit Master Bobby for a trial. An eye on the boys of the school would see in a minute what stuff they were made of. Supposing this young Italianissimo with the English tongue to be tolerably near the mark, with a deduction of two-thirds of the enthusiasm, Bobby might stop at the school as long as his health held out, or the master would keep him. Supposing half a dozen things and more, the meeting with this Mr. Calliani was a lucky accident. But lucky accidents are anticipated only by fools.

Lord Ormont consented to visit the school. He handed his card and invited his guest; he had a carriage in waiting for the day, he said; and obedient to Lady Charlotte's injunctions, he withheld Philippa from the party. She and her maid were to pass the five hours of his absence in efforts to keep their monkey Bobby out of the well of the solicitous bears.

My lord left his carriage at the inn of the village lying below the school-house on a green height. The young enthusiast was dancing him into the condition of livid taciturnity, which could, if it would, flash out pungent epigrams of the actual world at Operatic recitative.

"There's the old school-clock! Just in time for the half-hour before dinner," said Calliani, chattering two hundred to the minute, of the habits and usages of the school, and how all had meals together, the master, his wife, the teachers, the boys. "And she —as for her!" Calliani kissed finger up to the furthest skies: into which a self-respecting sober Northerner of the Isles could imagine himself to kick enthusiastic gesticulators, if it were polite to do so.

The school-house faced the master's dwelling-house, and these, with a block of building, formed

a three-sided enclosure, like barracks. Forth from the school-house door burst a dozen shouting lads, as wasps from the hole of their nest from a charge of powder. Out they poured whizzing; and the frog he leaped, and pussy ran and doubled before the hounds, and hockey-sticks waved, and away went a ball. Cracks at the ball anyhow, was the game for the twenty-five minutes breather before dinner.

"French day!" said Calliani, hearing their cries.

Then he bellowed "Matthew!—Giulio!"

A lusty inversion of the order of the names and an Oberland Jodler returned his hail. The school retreating caught up the Alpine cry in the dictance. Here were lungs! Here were sprites!

Lord Ormont bethought him of the name of the master. "Mr. Matthew, I think you said, sir," he was observing to Calliani, as the master came nearer; and Calliani replied: "His Christian name. But if the boys are naughty boys, it is not the privilege. Mr. Weyburn."

There was not any necessity to pronounce that name. Calliani spoke it, on the rush to his friend.

Lord Ormont and Weyburn advanced the steps to the meeting. Neither of them flinched in eye or limb.

At a corridor window of the dwelling-house a lady stood. Her colour was the last of a summer day over western seas: her thought: "It has come!" Her mind was in her sight; her other powers were frozen.

The two men conversed. There was no gesture.

This is one of the lightning moments of life for the woman, at the meeting of the two men between whom her person has been in dispute, may still be; her soul being with one. And that one, dearer than the blood of her body, imperilled by her.

She could ask why she exists, if a question were in her grasp. She would ask for the meaning of the gift of beauty to the woman, making her desirable to those two men, making her a cause of strife, a thing of doom. An incessant clamour dinned about her: "It has come!"

The two men walked conversing into the school-house. She was unconscious of the seeing of a third, though she saw and at the back of her mind believed she knew a friend in him. The two disappeared. She was insensible stone, except to the bell-clang: "It has come;" until they were in view again, still conversing: and the first of her thoughts to stir from petrifaction was: "Life holds no secret."

She tried, in shame of the inanimate creature she had become, to force herself to think: and had, for a chastising result, a series of geometrical figures shooting across her brain, mystically expressive of the situation, not communicably. The most vivid and persistent was a triangle. Interpret who may. The one beheld the two pass from view again, still conversing.

They are on the gravel; they bow; they separate. He of the grey head poised high has gone.

Her arm was pressed by a hand. Weyburn longed to enfold her, and she desired it, and her soul praised him for refraining. Both had that delicacy.

"You have seen, my darling," Weyburn said. "It has come, and we take our chance. He spoke not one word, beyond the affairs of the school. He has a grand-nephew in want of a school: visited the dormitories, refectory, and sheds: tasted the well-water, addressed me as Mr. Matthew. He had it from Giulio. Came to look at the school of Giulio's 'friend Matthew':—you hear him. Giulio little imagines!—Well, dear love, we stand with a squad in front, and wait the word. It mayn't be spoken. We have counted long before that something like it

was bound to happen. And you are brave. Ruin's an empty word for us two."

"Yes, dear, it is: we will pay what is asked of us," Aminta said. "It will be heavy, if the school . . . and I love our boys. I am fit to be the school-housekeeper; for nothing else."

"I will go to the boys' parents. At the worst, we can march into new territory. Emile will stick to us. Adolf, too, The fresh flock will come."

Aminta cried in the voice of tears: "I love the old so!"

"The likelihood is, we shall hear nothing further."

"You had to bear the shock, Matthew."

"Whatever I bore, and you saw, you shared."

"Yes," she said.

"Mais, n'oublions pas que c'est aujourd'hui jour Français; si, madame, vous avez assez d'appétit pour diner avec nous?"

"Je suis, comme toujours, aux ordres de Monsieur."

She was among the bravest of women. She had a full ounce of lead in her breast when she sat with the boys at their midday meal, showing them her familiar pleasant face.

Shortly after the hour of the evening meal, a

messenger from Bern delivered a letter addressed to the Head-master. Weyburn and Aminta were strolling to the playground, thinking in common, as they usually did. They read the letter together. These were the lines:

"Lord Ormont desires to repeat his sense of obligation to Mr. Matthew for the inspection of the school under his charge, and will be thankful to Mr. Calliani, if that gentleman will do him the favour to call at his hotel at Bern to-morrow, at as early an hour as is convenient to him, for the purpose of making arrangements, agreeable to the Head-master's rules, for receiving his grand-nephew Robert Benlew as a pupil at the school."

The two raised eyes on one another, pained in their deep joy by the religion of the restraint upon their hearts, to keep down the passion to embrace.

"I thank heaven we know him to be one of the true noble men," said Aminta, now breathing, and thanking Lord Ormont for the free breath she drew.

Weyburn spoke of an idea he had gathered from the earl's manner. But he had not imagined the proud lord's great-heartedness would go so far as to trust him with the guardianship of the boy. That

moved, and that humbled him, though it was far from humiliating.

Six months later, the brief communication arrived from Lady Charlotte:

"She is a widow.

"Unlikely you will hear from me again. Death is always next door, you said once. I look on the back of life.

"Tell Bobby, capital for him to write he has no longing for home holidays. If any one can make a man of him,

"That I know.

"CHARLOTTE EGLETT."

THE END.

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